

Air and Space this Week

Special Item

Thoughts from General Charles McGee *Tuskegee Airman Fighter Pilot of WWII*

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[Charles McGee](#) was an ROTC engineering student at the University of Illinois when Pearl Harbor happened. He wanted to serve, but the Army was mostly segregated then and his opportunities were limited. But the AAC had set up a training school for Black aircraft mechanics. McGee figured that if the AAC was training Black mechanics, that meant that the AAF planned to use Black pilots, too. He figured correctly, and ended up in Tuskegee, Alabama, training to fly military aircraft (for more on the Tuskegee Airmen, see [here](#)). What followed was a [distinguished career](#), including over 400 combat sorties in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. After his combat days were over, then-Colonel McGee would conduct school programs, where he discussed his “Four Ps” concept of success: Perceive, Prepare, Perform, and Perseverance.

I had the pleasure of meeting General McGee. He had just turned 100, and was traveling to promote the Ps and other patriotic themes. One of the last Docent events I attended, just after I retired, was his visit to the Udvar-Hazy Center to talk with the Docents. He took ample time to visit with everyone, after he gave a dynamite presentation. His stories from combat, and other aspects of his service, were both inspiring and exciting. And he also focused on what constituted “success” and how to achieve it in different situations, including outreach to the public. He covered the P-elements, and his mnemonic below was just as memorable. He said, “Solve this code and you will have THE one biggest element to personal success.”

He held up a card that read “1 20 20 9 20 21 4 5” We looked at it a few minutes, and then one of the Docents said to use a simple alpha-numeric replacement, “A is 1, B is 2, etc.” The audience quickly figured out the success element was “A T T I T U D E.”

Then the General said, “You are absolutely correct. The key element of your success is your attitude. But that decoding is incomplete. You’ve left something out.” We were perplexed. After about a minute, General McGee pulled a card from his pocket, just like the first. Except that this one not only had the number sequence above, it had this after it: “ = 100.”

“That’s right,” he said, “If you add up all the code numbers, you get 100. It’s not just that Attitude is 100% the key to success, it’s your 100% Attitude is 100% the key to your success.”

And I bet you won’t forget his little lesson on success, either. I know I haven’t.