



## Brigadier General Roscoe Conklin Cartwright

Brigadier General Roscoe Conklin Cartwright, affectionately known as "Rock," forged an impressive record during his 33 years of Army service. He overcame seemingly insurmountable barriers during his service, provided mentoring for young officers ascending through the military ranks and laid a roadmap that lives on today through his legacy. Serving in World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War, General Cartwright was the first black Field Artilleryman promoted to Brigadier General and would eventually serve in the Pentagon. In 1974, shortly after his retirement from active service, General Cartwright and his wife, Gloria, died in a commercial airplane crash while returning to their home outside of Washington, DC.

Born May 27, 1919, in Kansas City, KS, General Cartwright spent his youth in Tulsa, OK. With his sights originally set on a college education prior to the World War II draft, General Cartwright said, "I recall seeing very few blacks in uniform in Tulsa before World War II. Therefore, being or becoming a soldier did not interest me until the draft was initiated and they started the lottery in 1940." Thus, after graduating from Booker T. Washington High School in 1936, he returned to Kansas to attend the Kansas State Teachers College. Unable to continue financing school during the Great Depression, General Cartwright entered the workforce with stints at the University of Tulsa and the Bubble-Up Bottling Company.

Any plans of returning to college were put on hold as General Cartwright was drafted into the Army in 1941 and assigned to the 349<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment at Fort Sill, OK. Exemplary of the segregated army at the time, all of the men enlisted in the 349<sup>th</sup> were black while all of the officers, except the chaplain, were white. Upon completion of Officers Candidate School in November 1942, General Cartwright was commissioned as Field Artillery Second Lieutenant in the 599<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion of the famed 92<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division where he would remain throughout the war. He proudly led his men through the rigors of combat in Italy and, after the war, was promoted to First Lieutenant.

General Cartwright returned to his wife in the United States with intentions on returning to a civilian life and finishing college. While the 599<sup>th</sup> was temporarily stationed at Camp Robinson near Little Rock, AR, he had met and married Gloria Lacey who was from nearby Hope, AR. However, as General Cartwright stated, "When I arrived in November, all the schools were full. So I decided to remain in the Army another year." The Cartwright family, eventually including four children, would live not only in several US cities, but also in Germany, Korea and Japan as General Cartwright's continued success in the Army would lead to a military career.

After a transfer into the "regular" Army, which was unprecedented for a black officer, General Cartwright was promoted to Captain and served a combat tour in Korea. Next, in 1954, was a promotion to Major and duty in Korea and Japan. He remained in Vietnam until 1971, when he became the third black promoted to Brigadier General after General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr. and General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. Awards during this time include the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, Air Medal, National Defense Medal, Korean Service Medal and Vietnam Service Medal among others honors and decorations.

In the meantime, the steadfast pursuit of a college degree was completed through a Bachelor of Arts degree from San Francisco State College in June 1960. Further studies included computer training and courses towards a Masters in Business Administration. Perhaps this vocation instilled a strong value in General Cartwright as he continually stressed education regardless of a military commitment. At West Virginia College, he taught Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) for 3 years where he was posthumously inducted into their ROTC Hall of Fame in 1992. In Vietnam, General Cartwright installed an education and information office, created a library and initiated college courses taught by accredited teachers serving under his command.

Such leadership and determination could not be contained to the battlefields. General Cartwright applied his managerial and business skills to positions as Chief of the Management

**Division in Post Headquarters, Comptroller of the Seventh Army Training Center, Chief of the Budget and Five Year Defense Program, Comptroller Deputy Chief of Staff at the Army headquarters in Europe and comptroller duties at the Pentagon.** He retired from the Army in 1974. Another important duty was to nurture young officers in their ascendancy through the military ranks. To this end, General Cartwright was influential in shaping a loose network of black officers nicknamed the *Blue Geese*. On October 9, 1974, along with Colonel Robert B. Burke, General Cartwright led an initiative to formally organize the growing network into what became temporarily known as the *No Name Club* until they agreed on an official name. Shortly thereafter, on December 1<sup>st</sup>, the *No Name Club* was assembled to vote on a name when they received the news that General Cartwright and his wife had died in a plane crash that day.

Even his tragic death would not interrupt the spirit of nurturing and commitment embodied by General Cartwright as it became his legacy. The *No Name Club* soon voted to name itself *The ROCKS, Inc.* and establish the *Roscoe C. Cartwright Scholarship Fund* in their namesake's honor. This influence spread far and wide in the military as *The ROCKS, Inc.* currently boast over a dozen affiliations and over 1200 worldwide members including former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin L. Powell. One member, General Roy Bell, described General Cartwright as one who would "take you under his wing" and help young officers make important connections and choose the right path as he did when General Bell was a young officer.

Outside of the military, General Cartwright was a 33<sup>rd</sup> degree Prince Hall Mason. Over the years he had lived and exemplified himself as a good and upright man and Mason. Through the efforts of the executor of Brother Cartwright's estate, the remaining family members gave their permission to a group of Masons in the Maryland jurisdiction to use the family name after clearly and carefully stating their purpose and intentions. A new Lodge was forming and was named the Roscoe C. Cartwright #129 Prince Hall Masonic Lodge. Additionally, he was a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. which named him Alpha of the Year in 1971.

Besides the four children, his biological legacy includes eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. The gravesite is located in Arlington National Cemetery near the John F. Kennedy gravesite.

