

LINES FROM LINDA

BORN ON THE 4TH OF JULY

“ROCKY” THE BULLDOG ROCKS FORT STEWART, GEORGIA

BY LINDA AYERS TURNER KNORR



Bulldogs are highly regarded in my home state of Georgia! “Uga,” our University of Georgia Bulldog mascot, holds a special place in the hearts of those of us in the dog world who call it our alma mater, such as Brandi Hunter Munden, AKC VP of Public Relations, my brother, Roy Ayers, Jr., and me, to name a few. Imagine our excitement to learn of our American Kennel Club making possible the dream of the soldiers of the 3rd Infantry Division at Fort Stewart-Hunter Army Airfield 3rd Infantry Division in obtaining a new four-legged Bulldog soldier, “Rocky,” as their new mascot, replacing the former one that had recently passed away.

In 1965, the Army Division Commander wrote to Walt Disney looking for a mascot that would symbolize true fruit and heroism of the Dogface Soldiers. Thus, the great Disney himself created their animated mascot, “Rocky the Bulldog.”

To celebrate the U.S. ARMY’S 250TH ANNIVERSARY, Gina M. DiNardo, AKC President and CEO, led a team of AKC staff members, including Sheila Goffe, AKC Executive Secretary and VP of Government Relations, Doug Ljungren, AKC EVP Sports and Events, Brandi Hunter Munden, AKC VP Public Relations & Communications, and AKC Board of Directors members Christopher Sweetwood and Robin Stansel to Georgia to partner with the U.S. Army for “AKC SALUTES THE TROOPS.” In addition to the high energy, family-friendly, dog sport-filled weekend last month, our executives presented the new “Rocky” to the soldiers.

The presentation took place at Cottrell Field as part of the multi-day celebration honoring military working dogs and their handlers. Brig. Gen. Stephen E. Capehart, Deputy Commanding General of Support, 3rd Infantry Division, and Gina M. DiNardo spoke during the ceremony, highlighting the significance of Rocky’s arrival. “Rocky the Bulldog” will in-process at Fort Stewart like all other soldiers and serve to inspire to be heroic, fierce, and wise!



University of Georgia Mascot “Uga” with Roy Ayers, Jr. during his visit to Washington, D.C.



Jessica Rodriguez, 3rd Infantry Division Chief of Protocol, and Lt. Col. Angel Tomko, 3rd Infantry Division Public Affairs Team, advising their new recruit.

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2025 AKC Agility Premier Cup winners with AKC President and CEO, Gina M. DiNardo, and EVP of Sports and Events, Doug Ljungren.

The AKC Fastest Dogs USA, the AKC Agility Premier Cup, and the AKC Diving Dogs Challenge took place and were filmed to be presented later on ESPN.

Blessings abound when breeders come together to make special gifts such as "Rocky" possible. When word was received that a Bulldog was needed to become the Army's "Rocky," AKC Board member Robin Stansell reached out to his own Bulldog breed community to let the wish be known. Terry Borcharding and her daughter, Kimberly, of Ardmore, Oklahoma, stepped up to gift one of their dogs, AKC registered LT MY HEART GOES BOOM, to serve our country!

Robin Stansell shared, "I was happy to be a part of the American Kennel Club's effort to locate a Bulldog for the U.S. Army. I posted a request on a Bulldog list and Terry Borcharding quickly replied. I was excited to be able to attend the introduction of 'Rocky' to the Division and the accompanying AKC events. The Conformation Bulldog world is happy to share healthy, Standard-bred dogs with the public."



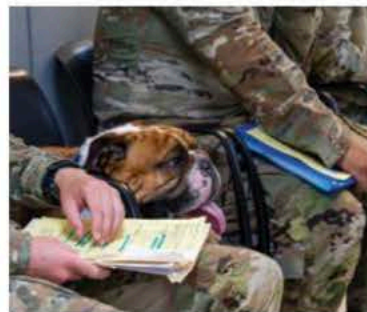
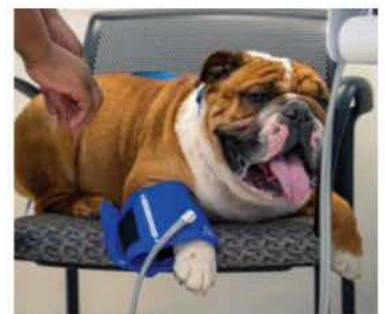
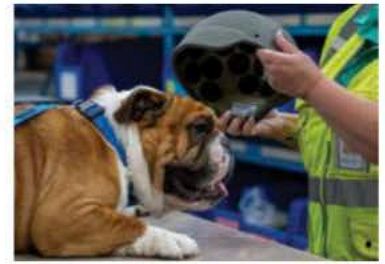
Maj. Gen. Christopher Norrie, 3rd Infantry Division Commander, and Division Command Sgt. Maj. Jonathan Reffeor, welcome "Rocky" to Fort Stewart.

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"During the luncheon with the Army members, I mentioned that I had retired from the Army in 1989 as an AH64 Apache helicopter pilot. I was then invited to fly their new AH-6 flight simulator and was delighted to learn that I could still fly the Apache in spite of all of the upgrades and 25-year absence from flying any helicopter. This was an unexpected surprise that I will always treasure."

"Rocky serves as yet another reminder that the 3rd Infantry Division truly is Georgia's Division," said Maj. Gen. Christopher Norris, 3rd Infantry Division Commanding General. "For years, 'Rocky' has been a symbol of this division's grit, determination, and camaraderie. Now he will inspire and bring joy to our Dogface Soldiers in real life every day."

And one more very special thing, from Doug Ljundren: "It is wonderful that the AKC was able to provide 'Rocky the Bulldog' as a mascot for Fort Stewart. With all of the ceremonies and gatherings, 'Rocky' is going to have an exciting life! And 'ROCKY' WAS BORN ON THE 4TH OF JULY! How perfect is that?" ■