



Come and Get It

Everold Daley's mission is simple: fresh food that tastes nothing like Army rations **BY TERRY WARD**

U.S. Army veteran Everold Daley (below) uses locally sourced ingredients in his authentic Jamaican cuisine at Soldier Camp Bar & Grill.



WHEN EVEROLD DALEY returned home to Port Antonio on Jamaica's north-east coast, he was disappointed to find that island food was different. People were eating processed foods that he compared to the unappetizing chow he ate during his long-ago stint in the U.S. Army, and he wanted to see Jamaicans taking advantage of the fresh produce, herbs and seafood surrounding them. Today, he runs Port Antonio's Soldier Camp Bar & Grill, where he serves locally sourced dishes that are anything but military grade.

How did you end up serving in the U.S. Army?

"I migrated from Jamaica to Brooklyn, New York, in 1977 to stay with my mom, and I was working on the dry docks on Staten Island. I decided to join the Army to repay the U.S. for giving me the chance to stay. That was 1979; I was just 19 years old. I graduated from basic and got transferred to the wooden barracks in Fort Riley, Kansas. The camaraderie was really good, but the C-ration was terrible. When we complained about the food, they'd give us MREs [meals ready to eat]. What I missed was some really good, natural Jamaican food. Eventually, many years later, I decided to come home."

Was Jamaican food all that you remembered it to be?

"Hardly. That was 1998, and things had changed. I couldn't find a decent meal. Everyone used to cook with natural seasonings: scallion, thyme and garlic. Nobody used powder stuff. But suddenly it was all MSG. I couldn't enjoy the food. So I decided to open a simple crawfish place. They're caught at night in the Rio Grande River in Portland parish, near where I live. I opened right here out of my home, and people started to come."

What Jamaican traditions are you keeping alive?

"In Jamaica, grandmothers always take their sons and grandsons and say, 'I'll teach you to cook so if your wife ever leaves you, you'll never die of hunger.' My grandmother is 94 and still cooks the best food in the world. She made me learn. I use old tire rims to hold the Dutch pots and cook on an open fire with natural coal and pimento wood chips from the Jamaican allspice tree. The ingredients are all-natural, from the island. I speak to my old traditions because I want people to enjoy the flavor. There's something about the pots and the coal that bring out Jamaica's real taste."

So, what's for lunch?

"We grate coconut to make the milk for curries. There's always whole steamed or escovitch snapper, shrimp curry and, of course, river crayfish and, in season, lobster. Some people come in and look skeptical because the restaurant is tiny. It's not five-star. We tell them we might have a two-star appearance, but it's a five-star taste."