

## Welcome home

After tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, Sgt. Cheryl Dupris takes a dream trip to NAPA

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Sgt. 1st Class Cheryl Dupris thanks Pat Burke for the lunch at Judd's Hill Winery. Dupris, a fan of petite sirah, contacted the PS I Love You organization that has planned a wine tasting tour for her through Napa and Sonoma. Lianne Milton/ Register

Since Sept. 11, 2001, Sgt. 1st Class Cheryl Dupris, a member of the U.S. Army's Individual Ready Reserve, has completed three tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan.

During all that time she longed for her favorite wine, petite sirah.

When she was about to be released from active duty in mid-March, she decided she would go straight to the source.

She Googled "petite sirah," found the Web site of the varietal's promotional organization, PS I Love You, and e-mailed a request for the names of some petite sirah producers in California. "I want to tour a place where I can enjoy petite sirah and eat and sleep for a week. I don't want to take a trip to a winery and find that I can not drink my favorite wine," she wrote.

Jo Diaz, executive director of PS I Love You, sent her a list of wineries in various appellations, and after a few e-mail exchanges, a simple request to set up a tour of producers in Napa and Sonoma counties started to take on a life of its own.

It turned out to be more than just a tour — it became a dream trip. Diaz enlisted support of not only vintners, but hotels, restaurants and even a hot air balloon company, for an action-packed visit that extended over 10 days. And, of course, there were bottles of petite sirah for her to take back to her home in New York City.

As Diaz was making all the arrangements, she kept Dupris informed of what was happening, but Dupris' laptop was malfunctioning, and she didn't see her e-mail for several days. When she was finally back online, she was overwhelmed at what was in store for her.

The Napa Valley portion of the visit involved a tour and lunch with the Finkelstein family at Judd's Hill Winery and a cave tour and lunch with George and Ann Moskowite at Moss Creek Winery. Also on the agenda were personalized tastings with Denis Sutro at Carver Sutro Vineyards, Pat Girard of Girard Winery, Kathy Nelson at Stags' Leap Winery, Dave Pramuk at Robert Biale Vineyards and Bryan Del Bondio at Markham Vineyards. Early one morning, before embarking on a taste tour, Dupris was treated to a hot air balloon ride by Balloons Above the Valley. She also visited wineries in Livermore and more than half a dozen petite sirah producers in Sonoma County, where she also was hosted at winemaker dinners and was provided with lodging. She spent Easter Sunday with Diaz' family in Windsor.

Dupris' love of petite sirah started in 1998 when she attended a luncheon meeting of her American Legion Post at the Meli Melo restaurant in New York. By coincidence she had heard an item on a radio program the night before talking about syrah, and the wine offered at the luncheon was a syrah. "I was not a wine drinker," she said. "But the wine was

free, so I drank it and I enjoyed it.”

During the next month’s luncheon the same wine was served, and again she liked it, but the third month there was no more syrah. She asked the restaurant owner about it and wondered where he got it, but he replied that he didn’t know because it was an introductory wine that was given to him.

She started a quest to find the wine and visited liquor store after liquor store to no avail. “I was at a loss,” she said. “I went to Discount Liquors on 14th Street and asked for it, and the man told me, ‘I don’t sell syrah, but I have something better.’ He led me to a wall and showed me bottles of petite sirah. I reluctantly bought a bottle and took it home and drank it with a World War II vet lady friend. Our teeth turned purple. It was love after first drink.”

“I went back to the store to get some more, but never even looked at the brand. All I saw on the label was ‘petite sirah.’ I never realized that (the brand) made a difference. I knew nothing about wine. Wine was wine.”

### Quest for petite sirah

Dupris said she returned to the store regularly after that and also started looking in other places. “There was a small store in the financial district, and I asked for petite sirah and he found seven bottles in back,” she said. “I said I’d take them all, but he said, ‘You must know something I don’t,’ and he kept one of them for himself.”

What attracted her to petite sirah? “The wine I had tasted before was either too sweet or too sour and made my mouth feel funny,” she said. “This (petite sirah) just felt good. It covered my whole mouth and didn’t make me scrunch up my mouth or nose. It tasted good.”

During her wine country tour, she was given a glass of sauvignon blanc, but she didn’t care for it. “It tasted like water,” she said. “I just like petite sirah.”

As she related the story, Dupris was given encouragement by Pramuk, co-proprietor of Robert Biale Vineyards and president of PS I Love You this year. “You’re drinking what you like to drink,” he said during the tasting session at his winery. “Others drink what they think they should drink.”

One time, while she was on duty in Mississippi following hurricanes Katrina and Rita, she wandered into a tiny store “in the middle of nowhere and I found some petite sirah on the shelf,” she said. She was told, “The manager likes it — that’s why he ordered it.”

Dupris, who declined to give her age, is a full-blooded Native American, born and raised in South Dakota on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation. Following high school graduation, she enlisted in the Army, served on active duty, and after she was discharged, moved to Millbrae, where she worked for a CPA firm for two years. Then she re-enlisted, served another hitch in the Army with the 82nd Airborne Division, and after that was completed, went into the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR).

IRR Reservists do not belong to any specific unit, and their names are on a list of personnel with duty qualifications at Human Resources Command. “When they need us, they call us,” she said.

They needed her, called her up and she went to Iraq twice, each time for a nine-month tour, then to Afghanistan, where she served until returning to the U.S. in March. In between those tours she served in Louisiana and Mississippi on hurricane relief duty.

In civilian life Dupris works in marketing for Verizon in the corporate offices in New York, and is active in several veterans’ organizations.

Just before her third deployment, her friends, many of whom are World War II vets whom she met while serving on the United War Veterans Council, threw a party for her. Knowing her fondness for petite sirah, they had to find a place that carried petite sirah on the wine list.

### Helping the Iraqis

As she showed off some earrings and a ring she bought in Iraq, she said, “I was administrative, so I was limited in what I could do for the Iraqi people. So I patronized their shops.” She said she even willingly paid above the asking price, just to help them.

“I’m a civilian, my civilian job takes care of me and the military takes care of me, so I wanted to do something to take care of them,” she said. Dupris feels strongly about supporting the Iraqi people, and in one of her e-mails to Diaz, she wrote, “I was first mobilized on 11 Sep 01 at 10:30 in the morning and have contributed to the Global War on Terror since. ... Coming from New York City I have a personal compassion for my support of the Global War on Terror.”

In contacting PS I Love You members to solicit their participation, Diaz said it would be a way “to say thank you to Cheryl for putting her life on the line for us all, regardless of politics and/or the right or wrong of the war. We all have an opportunity to make a life-long lasting memory with Cheryl.”