

## John Riley

Tim O'Brien

John Riley came from Galway town in the years of the Irish hunger

And he sailed away to America when the country was much younger  
Now the place was strange and work was scarce

And all he knew was farming

So he followed his other Irish friends to a job in the US Army

Adventure calls and some men run, and this is their sad story  
How some get drunk on demon rum and some get drunk on glory

Now they marched down Texas way to the banks of the Rio Grande  
They built a fort on the banks above to taunt old Santa Anna  
They were treated bad and paid worse, and then the fighting started

And the more they fought the less they thought of the damned old US Army

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Now when the church bells rang on Sunday morn, it set his soul  
a shiver

He saw the Senoritas washing their hair on the far side of the  
river

Then John Riley and two hundred more Irish mercenaries

And they cast their lot, right or not, south of the Rio Grande

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How they fought bravely under the flag of the San Patricios  
Till the Yankees soldiers beat them down at the battle of Churubusco

Then fifteen men were whipped like mules

On the cheeks they were hot iron branded

Made to dig the graves of fifty more, who a hanging fate had handed

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Now John Riley stands and drinks alone at a bar in Vera Cruz  
And he wonders if it matters much if you win or if you lose

"Well, I'm a man who can't go home, I'm a vagabond", says he  
"I'm a victim of some wanderlust and divided loyalty"

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