

Tom Russell, Claude Dallas

In a land the Spanish once had called the Northern Mystery
Where rivers run and disappear
And the Mustang still lives free
By the Devil's wash and the coyote hole
In the wild Owyhee Range
Somewhere in the sage tonight
The wind calls out his name
Aye Aye Aye

Come gather 'round me buckaroos
a story I will tell
Of the fugitive Claude Dallas
Who just broke out of jail
You may think this tale is a history
From before the West was won
But the events that I'll describe took place in 1981

He was born out in Virginia
He left home when school was through
And in he deserts of Nevada
He became a buckaroo
And he learned the ways of cattle
And he learned to sit a horse
He always packed a pistol
And he practiced deadly force

And then Claude became a trapper
And he dream't of the bygone days,
And he studied bobcat logic
And the wild and silent ways
In the bloody runs near paradise
And the monitors down south
Trapping cats and coyotes
And livin' hand to mouth
Aye Aye Aye

And then Claude took to livin' all alone
Out many miles from town
A friend Jim Stevens brought supplies
And he stayed to hang around
That day two wardens Pogue and Elms
Drove in to check Claude out
They were seeking violations
And to see what Claude's about

Now Claude had hung some venison
He had a bobcat pelt or two
Pogue claimed they were out of season
He said "Dallas, you're all through"
But Dallas would not leave his camp
He refused to go to town
And the wind howled through the bull camp
They stared each other down.

It's hard to say what happend next
Perhaps we'll never know
They were gonna take Claude into jail
And he vowed he'd never go
Jim Stevens heard the gunshot
And when he turned around
Bill Pogue was fallin' backwards
Conley Elms he fell face down
Aye Aye Aye

Jim Stevens walked on over
There was a gun near Bill Pogue's hand
It's hard to say who'd drawn his first
But Claude had made his stand
Claude said "I am justified...
They were gonna gun me down...
And a man's got a right to hang some meat...
When he's livin' this far from town."

It took 18 men, 15 months
To finally hunt Claude down
In the sage outside of paradise
They ran him to the ground
Convicted up in Idaho
Manslaughter by decree
Twenty years at maximum
But soon Claude would break free

There's two sides to the story
There may be no right or wrong
The lawman and the renegade
Have graced a thousand songs
The story is an old one
A conclusion's hard to draw
But Claude's out in the sage tonight
He may be the last outlaw
Aye Aye Aye

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