

Tim O'Brien, John Riley

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
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
Some get drunk on demon rum and some get drunk on glory

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, paid worse, and then the fighting started
The more they fought the less they thought of the damned old US Army

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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
John Riley and two hundred more Irish mercenaries
Cast their lot, right or not, south of the Rio Grande

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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
And on the cheeks were hot iron branded
Made to dig the graves of fifty more, who a hanging fate had handed

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John Riley stands and drinks alone at a bar in Vera Cruz
He wonders if it matters much if you win or if you lose
I'm a man who can't go home, a wanderer, says he
A victim of some wanderlust and divided loyalty

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