

Tim O'Brien "John Riley"

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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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