

John Riley
Tim O'Brien

Dm
John Riley came from Galway town
G
in the years of the Irish hunger
Dm
And he sailed away to America
C G Dm
when the country was much younger
Dm
The place was strange and work was scarce
G
and all he knew was farming
Dm
So he followed his other Irish friends
F C Dm
to a job in the US Army

[chorus]

F Dm
Adventure calls and some men run
F G
and this is their sad story
Dm
Some get drunk on demon rum
C G Dm
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.

[repeat chorus]

Dm
When the church bells rang on Sunday morn
G
it set his soul a shiver
Dm
He saw the señoritas washing their hair
C G Dm
on the far side of the river
Dm
John Riley and two hundred more
G
Irish mercenaries
Dm
Cast their lot, right or not,
F C Dm
south of the Rio Grande.

[repeat chorus]

Now 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.

[repeat chorus]

Now, 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 vagabond", says he.
"A victim of some wanderlust
and divided loyalty."

[repeat chorus x 2]