

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]