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**JOHN RILEY AND THE BATTALION "SAN PATRICIO" –
THE IRISH HEROS WHO FOUGHT FOR MEXICO IN THE
NAME OF ST. PATRICK**

A different vision of History.....



Doc. AA - 44
EN - 05 - 2017

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From right to left : Βυζάντιον, Αυτοκρατορικός Θυρεός κατά την περίοδον τῶν Παλαιολόγων (Armoiries de l'Empire Byzantin, Dynastie de Paléologues – Coat of arms of the Byzantine Empire, Paleologos Dynasty – Escudo del Imperio Bizantino, Dinastía de Paleólogos) ; Emblème du Patriarcat Orthodoxe de Constantinople – Blazon of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Constantinople – Escudo del Patriarcado Ortodoxo de Constantinopla ; Aigle bicéphale russe impérial et contemporain – Russian double-headed eagle imperial and contemporary – Águila bicéfala rusa imperial y contemporánea ; Armoiries de l'Alcazar de Tolède, Espagne – Coat of arms of the Alcazar of Toledo, Spain – Escudo del Alcázar de Toledo, España.

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Printed in Brussels (2017).

JOHN RILEY AND THE BATTALION "SAN PATRICIO" – THE IRISH HEROS WHO FOUGHT FOR MEXICO IN THE NAME OF ST. PATRICK

They were proud and doomed, Irish rogue cannoneers under a green silk banner, fighting against their former comrades-in-arms to defend Mexico against the invading US Army. To the Mexicans they were heroic saviors, but they were seen as despicable traitors by the Anglo-Protestant officers who faced their grapeshot and cannonballs. The "San Patricios" liked to sing "Green Grow the Rushes, O"; it is said that the Mexican soldiers began to refer to their Irish comrades as "los greengros", but Spanish speakers had difficulty pronouncing a second "r" in "green grows", which was elided as "green-gos" to end with "gringos".



SUMMARY

They were renowned as war heroes in Mexico, hanged as traitors by the US Army, and forgotten back in famine-racked Ireland. The story refers to the **Saint Patrick's Battalion** - known in Spanish as "*El Batallón de San Patricio*" or simply "*San Patricios*" - a Mexican army elite unit composed primarily by Irish Catholics, who had defected from the invading US army during the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). When the Irishmen defected to the Mexican side and fought American troops under a green silk banner emblazoned with St. Patrick - a shamrock and the traditional harp of "Erin" - they earned the wrath of the US military and the everlasting admiration of Mexico.

For years an obscure historical footnote, the story is being dusted off today as an allegory for the plight of Mexican immigrants to USA, a morality tale on the implacability of American imperialism ("*Manifest Destiny*"), a paradigm of inter-ethnic solidarity and an example of bravery. While an army of Irishmen fighting on the dusty plains of the Rio Grande seems like one of history's quirky aberrations, the "San Patricios" were actually just one of a long list of Gaelic regiments to serve in other countries' armies over the centuries. In fact, instances of men from the Emerald Isle travelling abroad to take part in foreign wars was so common between the 17th and 19th centuries, that the Irish had a name for these émigré soldiers. They called them the "*Wild Geese*".

The great majority of the "*San Patricios*" were recent immigrants who had arrived at northeastern US ports, part of the Irish Diaspora then fleeing burgeoning famine and extremely poor economic conditions in Ireland, as well as political repression in consequence of the English occupation of the island. Unlike the Irish who had immigrated to America in the eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries, who tended to be skilled craftsmen and Protestants, most of these new Irish immigrants were poor farmers and Catholics. The United States had been founded and long dominated by Protestants, and as a result, there was widespread prejudice against and fear of Catholicism. Many US citizens thought that Catholics were superstitious, ignorant, and incapable of independent thought. The American anti-immigrant press of the time caricatured the Irish with simian features, portraying them as unintelligent and drunk and charging that they were seditiously loyal to the pope. At least 20 people were killed and two churches were burned in anti-Catholic riots in Philadelphia during that era, and a mob in Massachusetts burned a catholic convent. But cheap Irish labor was welcome. Irish maids became as familiar as Latin American nannies are today.

The Irish families arriving in the north-eastern port cities of the USA typically brought precious little with them other than the clothes on their backs, and were often dependent on the support of families that had arrived before them. The US Army found a potent recruiting pool among poverty stricken Irish men arriving exhausted on English "*coffin ships*", as they offered immediate employment, adventure and everything else that is used to lure men to sign up for the military, then and now. Thousands joined the US Army at \$7 a month. Thus, at the time of the Mexican-American War, about half of the U.S. Army was made up of recent Irish

immigrants to the United States, many of whom had chosen military service because no other jobs were available to them.

Long discriminated against at home by the British, who had been occupying Ireland for many centuries, Irish immigrants discovered that they were subject to much of the same treatment in the United States. Young Irishmen, in a new country and culture, were often disappointed by the harsh reality of US army life once they had signed up with the American military institution with a largely Protestant leadership. It was believed that since these newcomers were not yet regular US citizens, they lacked the patriotism that motivated other American soldiers. Critics cited that these new immigrants were rather fighting for money, than to defend the US, and thus they were not "real" soldiers. As a result of this discrimination, Irish-born soldiers were usually given the lowliest and hardest army jobs, and received fewer promotions. "*Potato heads*", as the Irish were commonly called, were particularly singled out for harsher treatment and were prevented from practicing their own catholic religion.

In March 1845, Texas, which had declared its independence from Mexico nine years earlier, became the 28th state of the Union. Mexico had promised that this unilateral action would mean war, since Mexico never officially recognized Texas as an independent nation. At this time, US society was infused with the spirit of expansionism (the movement of US settlers across the nation's current borders) and by the idea of "*Manifest Destiny*", i.e. the concept that it was not only the right, but the duty of US citizens to spread their culture and way of life across, and in fact take control of the rest of the continent. US (11th) President **James Knox Polk** (1795-1849, a Presbyterian of Scots-Irish descent !) was an ardent expansionist, and he was only the most prominent among a large number of upper class Americans who hoped Mexico would make the first move and start a war. If this occurred, it was widely believed that the US could take easily over parts or even all of Mexico. It is worth noting that the ethnic prejudice that was used to justify the unfair treatment of the Irish was extended to Mexicans, who were considered lazy, irresponsible, uncivilized, and too excitable and who also were predominantly Catholic.

Soon after the annexation (granting of official state-hood) of Texas, President Polk sent 7.000 troops under the command of General **Zachary Taylor** (1784-1850) to Corpus Christi, a town on the **Nueces River**, the traditional border between Texas and Mexico. The following spring, Taylor was ordered to move his troops south to the **Rio Grande**, a river about 100 miles south of the Nueces River that the US was now declaring as its new border, hoping that this invasion would push Mexico to start first the war. Across the river was the Mexican town of **Matamoros**. On Sunday mornings, the US soldiers could hear the church bells calling the residents of Matamoros to the Catholic church service. During the months between the arrival of the US troops at the Rio Grande and May 13, 1846 - date at which the United States officially declared the war to Mexico - about forty US soldiers also answered that call, never to return to the United States. They deserted the US army, swimming across the river, to join the enemy on the other side for fighting against their former officers and fellow US soldiers. They did so for a variety of reasons including the harsh discipline and treatment they had been receiving from the US Army, the economic incentives offered by the Mexican government for deserters (higher wages than in the US Army and generous land grants), the lure of a friendly

and welcoming Mexican people who shared their religion, and above all because of a fervent feeling of sympathy for the Mexicans, whose homeland had been invaded by a foreign power like theirs. This affirmation is based on evidence by the number of deserting Irish Catholics, the letters of John Riley, and the testimony from other senior officers.

At the head of this band of deserters was an Irish-born private (the US army's lowest rank) named **John Riley**, also known as **John Patrick O'Riley**. His original Irish name was Seán Ó' Raghailigh, born in Clifden, Galway County, Ireland, between 1817 and 1818. Riley had served with the British Army prior to his enlisting in the US army in September 1845 and was incorporated in the ranks of Company K, of the 5th US Infantry Regiment, camped in Texas close to the Mexican border. Conditions on the Rio Grande only seemed to increase the hostility of the Protestant officers towards the Irish and the other Catholics in Riley's regiment. Officers such as Braxton Bragg and Thomas Sherman were notorious 'Nativists' and anti-Catholics, and this bigotry - combined with his professional frustration and unease at being part of a Protestant army invading a Catholic nation - increased Riley's sense of alienation from the US army. By most accounts, the final straw came when the Irish, who were also Catholic, witnessed fellow American Soldiers desecrating Mexican catholic churches and mistreating priests and nuns. The inner conflict was resolved, principle won! Riley deserted on 12 April 1846 swimming across the Rio Grande after asking permission to go to Mass. Writing later he said: "*Listening only to the advice of my conscience for the liberty of a people which had war brought on them by most unjust aggression...I separated myself from the American forces*".

It should be noted that Riley defected the American ranks prior to the actual declaration of war. He is generally credited with founding and organizing the Saint Patrick's Battalion named after St. Patrick, an Irish Saint *par excellence*. Part of the original confusion, over whether Riley really founded this battalion was caused by the different spellings of his name found in official records. John Riley, himself signed his name as Riley, other times as Riely, Reilly, or O'Riley in his correspondence. Mexican government records list him as Juan Reyle, Reley, Reely or Reily. His enlistment record for the US Army lists him as Reilly.

Riley at first was successful in persuading 48 Irishmen to defect, and these men made up the original Saint Patrick's Battalion. In Mexico, Riley somehow linked up with General **Pedro de Ampudia**, the Cuban-born commander-in-chief of the Mexican army, who quickly recognized Riley's leadership skills, appointed him 1stLieutenant and gave him command of the company of the 48 Irishmen in the Mexican Army. **Thus, the legend of the Saint Patrick's battalion, the popular "San Patricios" was born.** For the most part, these men came from Dublin, Cork, Galway and Mayo. The Mexicans referred to them as "**Los Colorados**", after their red hair and ruddy, sunburnt complexions. A month after they were established, Riley's company manned the canons during the six-day siege (3-9 May 1846) of the American garrison at **Fort Texas** along the north banks of the Rio Grande by Mexican forces commanded by General **Mariano Arista**.

In addition to more Irishmen joining his battalion, Riley welcomed other foreign-born US deserters, as well as American-born deserters. Also, some Irish-born civilian residents of

Mexico were persuaded to join the struggle. Thus, the number of "*San Patricios*" rose to more than 175 in October 1846, but even then the Irish-born members still represented nearly 50 per cent of them. The rest of the battalion included Germans, English, Scots, French, Italians, Poles, Spaniards, Swiss, Mexicans, Canadians, including escaped slaves from the Southern United States. In spite of its multi-ethnic composition, the Saint Patrick's Battalion did, however, have a distinctly Irish identity since their name-sake, St. Patrick, is the patron saint of the Irish people.

Although not in common use in smaller units, General **Antonio López de Santa Anna** allowed the "*San Patricios*" to fly a war banner during the war. Riley is believed to have designed the battalion's distinct Green silk flag which was embroidered by a group of nuns and displayed at San Luis Potosí in central Mexico in autumn 1846. It displayed on one side an Irish harp surmounted by the Mexican coat-of-arms (with the eagle, the cactus and the snake) with a scroll reading "*Libertad por la República Mexicana*" (Freedom for the Mexican Republic) and underneath the harp was the motto in Gaelic "*Erin go Brágh*" (Ireland for Ever). On the other side, Saint Patrick was depicted holding in his left hand a key and in his right a crook or staff resting upon a serpent. Underneath was painted "*San Patricio*". Even before this flag flew, however, and even before the official May 13 declaration of Mexican- American war, the men who would make up the core of the San Patricio Battalion had taken part in the first two battles of the war at **Palo Alto** and **Resaca de la Palma** (May 8 and 9, 1846) . However, the Battles of **Monterrey** (September 21–24, 1846), **Buena Vista** (February 22–23, 1847), and **Churubusco** (August 20, 1847) are where the Saint Patrick's Battalion left its most notable war marks.

The "*San Patricios*" were renowned for their skill as artillerymen. The Saint Patrick's Battalion was officially an infantry unit, but essentially acted as the sole Mexican artillery able to counter-balance the US fast-moving and fast-firing "flying artillery" or "horse artillery". In many cases, the battalion's contribution was critical because Mexican cannoners were inexperienced and inadequately trained and Mexican artillery had a poor cannon range of 400 meters, much less than the American one.

Following its successes on the battlefields, the Saint Patrick's Battalion grew in size, joined by other recent, disgruntled and marginalized immigrants – historians estimate the strength of the unit to be as much as 700 members at its peak. Therefore, the "*San Patricios*" were ordered - by personal instruction of General Santa Anna - to muster a larger infantry battalion in mid-1847. It was renamed "*La Legión extranjera de los San Patricios*" (The Foreign Legion of San Patricios) and consisted of volunteers from many European countries, commanded by Colonel Francisco R. Moreno, with Riley in charge of 1st company and Santiago O'Leary heading up the second.

United under their green banner, the "*San Patricios*" participated in all major battles of the war - **Palo Alto** and **Resaca de la Palma** (May 8 and 9, 1846), **Monterrey** (September 20, 1846), **Buena Vista** (February 22-23, 1847), **Cerro Gordo** (12-18 April, 1847), **Contreras and Churubusco** (19-20 August 1847) - and were cited for "*daring bravery*" by General **Antonio López de Santa Anna**. Santa Anna later remarked that if he had commanded a few

hundred more “*San Patricios*”, Mexico would have won the war... At the battle of Monterrey the “*San Patricios*” proved their artillery skills by causing the deaths of many American soldiers, and they were credited with defeating two to three separate US assaults into the heart of the city. Among their targets were companies led by such officers as Braxton Bragg, many of whose soldiers would end up in their own ranks later in the war. At the Battle of Buena Vista (known as the battle of Angostura in Mexico) in Coahuila, on 23 February, the “*San Patricios*” became engaged with US forces and they were assigned the three heaviest (18 and 24 pound) cannons the Mexican army possessed, which were positioned on high ground overlooking the battlefield. They started the battle supporting Mexican infantry by firing on US lines as the Mexicans advanced onto them, then later decimating an artillery battery directly opposite them on the battlefield (Washington’s 4th Artillery, D Battery). A small detachment of “*San Patricios*” were dispatched with a division commanded by Manuel Lombardini with the express purpose of capturing the 4th’s cannons once the crews had been dealt with. The division charged with bayonets the US artillery battery, routing its crew, thus leaving “*San Patricios*” free to haul away two six-pound cannons. These cannons would later be used by Mexican forces at the Battles of Contreras and Churubusco.

At the penultimate battle of the war at Churubusco, holed up in a Catholic monastery (“Convento de San Pablo”) and surrounded by a superior force of American infantry, cavalry and artillery, the “*San Patricios*” withstood three major assaults and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. They fought until their ammunition was exhausted and even then tore down three times the white flag that was raised by their Mexican comrades in arms, preferring to struggle on gallantly with bayonets and sabers until finally being overwhelmed by sheer numbers. US Captain James Milton Smith finally stopped the fighting by putting up a white handkerchief. Despite their brave resistance, however, 85 of the Irish battalion were captured (including wounded Riley and O’Leary). Seventy-two of them were immediately charged with desertion from the US Army. They were to be tried by US court-martial in two groups, on August 23, in the town of Tacubaya and on August 26, at San Angel, as traitors. At neither of these trials were the prisoners represented by lawyers, nor were transcripts made of the proceedings. At their court-martial, most “*San Patricios*” said they had been forced to desert by the Mexicans, or had too much to drink. *“They needed an excuse. They couldn’t say ‘I hated the United States,’ so they said they weren’t responsible”*, wrote **Robert Ryal Miller**, in his book *“Shamrock and Sword, the Saint Patrick’s Battalion”*, (published September 15th, 1989).

Among those demanding harsh punishment for the “*San Patricios*” were various Irish non-deserters - who felt the renegades intensified anti-immigrant prejudice in the US army - and particularly one of the American commanders, Lt. Col. **William Harney** (also of Irish origin!). Only two of the prisoners were found to be not guilty, since they had never actually joined the US Army. Two others were found guilty but given the usual punishment for desertion, death by firing squad. Of the remaining “*San Patricios*”, about fifty received the sentence of death by hanging, a less humane form of execution than death by firing squad. The rest of them, including John Riley - on the ground that they had deserted from the US Army before war had been officially declared - received a lesser sentence that included whipping with fifty lashes and being branded on the cheek with a “D” for deserter. The condemned “*San Patricios*” were scourged, whipped and branded with red-hot branding irons with the letter

"D" for deserter. Some were branded on the hip, while others were branded on the cheek, and John Riley was branded on both cheeks for good measure. Most of the convicted "*San Patricios*" were sentenced to death by hanging: 30 from the Tacubaya trial and 18 from San Angel, in the largest judicial killing ever carried out by American authorities. However, execution by hanging was in violation of the contemporary Articles of War, which stipulated that the penalty for desertion and/or defecting to the enemy during a time of war was death by firing squad, regardless of the circumstances. Hanging was reserved only for spies (without uniform) and for "atrocities against civilians", neither of which activities were among the charges brought against any members of the Saint Patrick's Battalion. It should be noted that, though more than 9,000 US soldiers deserted the army during the Mexican-American War, only the "*San Patricios*" were punished by hanging. General Winfield Scott Hancock assigned Colonel William Harney to carry out the terms of the sentences, chosen intentionally on the ground of his Irish Catholic heritage (!) and his notorious cruelty. William Harney had a chilling CV even in an era that sanctioning brutality was spared in the name of "*Manifest Destiny*". Wanted in St. Louis for beating his slave housekeeper to death, he was notorious for ravishing and hanging Indian women, as Robert Ryal Miller and other historians credited.

A large section of the executions crossed into the realm of gross cruelty, sadism and political theatre, General Scott ordering a group to be hung within sight of the Battle of Chapultepec, one of the last clashes of the war after Mexico City was taken, just as an American flag was raised on the nearby castle. This was done after Juan Escutia - the last of the six young military cadets who refused to fall back when General Bravo finally ordered retreat and fought to the death - grabbed the Mexican flag, wrapped it around himself and jumped off the castle to prevent the flag from falling into enemy hands. Harney was taunted and jeered by the condemned men during their execution. While overseeing the hangings, William Harney ordered **Francis O'Connor** hanged even though he had had both legs amputated the previous day. When the army surgeon informed the colonel that the absent soldier could not walk for he had lost both his legs in battle, Harney replied: "*Bring the damned son of a bitch out! My order was to hang 30 and by God I'll do it!*". Riley and his tortured companions were forced to dig their fallen comrades' graves. The Mexican government described the inhuman treatment and hangings of war prisoners as "a cruel death or horrible torments, improper in a civilized age, and [ironic] for a people who aspire to the title of illustrious and humane"! In recounting what happened to the "*San Patricios*", some historians assert that receiving such practices as whipping and branding was very unusual at the time of the Mexican-American War. These historians suggest that the "*San Patricios*" may have been so harshly treated because of their lower civil status as mostly Irish Catholic immigrants in the US.

John Riley was not one of those executed, a distinction drawn between those who had deserted before and after the war had started. Instead, he was branded with a two inch letter "D" on his face and given fifty lashes. He suffered through his flogging in grim silence, but he screamed and passed out when branded on the right cheek, just below his eye. An American officer inspected the damage and noticed the brand had been applied upside down. The Irish captain was brought back to consciousness, and the brand was reapplied correctly on his left cheek. The result was a large ugly welt on each cheek which were highly noticeable. He was later among the remaining "*San Patricios*" prisoners released back into Mexican custody, as

part of the of Guadalupe Hidalgo treaty (February 2, 1848) that ended hostilities. In fact, following the war, the Mexican Government insisted in a clause of the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty that the remaining “*San Patricios*” prisoners held by the Americans were to be left in Mexico, and Major General William Orlando Butler issued General Order 116 on June 1, 1848 stating that “*The prisoners confined at the Citadel, known as the San Patricio prisoners, will be immediately discharged*”. The US Army withdrew from Mexico City on June 1, 1848. One of the last duties of the US forces in Mexico City involved a punishment detail. John Riley and his men, heads shaved, were driven from the Citadel by fife and drum rattling out “*The Rogue’s March*” (a well-known tune used by the American army during the Revolution and played when military and/or civil rogues, criminals, offenders and various undesirable characters were drummed from camps and cantonment). Beyond the gates of the Citadel, the guards watched astonished as Riley took off his tattered prison garb and drew the formal uniform coat of a Mexican colonel, emblazoned with the orders and decorations awarded to a foreigner soldier by a grateful nation. After mounting a fine horse, Don Juan (John Riley) spurred off in the company of Mexican generals...

The Saint Patrick’s Battalion continued to function until end 1848 as two infantry companies, with one unit tasked with sentry duty in Mexico City and the other stationed in the suburbs of Guadalupe Hidalgo, under the command of John Riley, before their disbandment as the Mexican government attempted to reorganize their military after the Mexican-American war. Riley would remain in Mexican service until 1850, dying in unknown circumstances sometime later. Other “San Patricios” veterans would make lives for themselves in Mexico, with a small number returning to Ireland.

Fueled by “*Manifest Destiny*”, the American government dictated terms to the Mexicans in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which was signed on February 2, 1848 and came into force on July 4, 1848. More than half of the Mexican Territory was taken, and out of it the US would carve the new States of California, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah and Wyoming, and add parts to those of Kansas and Colorado. Several American politicians (including **Abraham Lincoln**) considered unjust the aggression against a weak nation, and underscored the true cause: annexing territory to become slave states that would protect and increase the power of the southern area of the US. General **Ulysses Grant** later expressed the view that the war against Mexico was one of the most unjust wars ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation and that it had brought punishment on the United States in the form of the American Civil War (1861-1865). Among all the major wars fought by the United States, the Mexican -American War is the least discussed in the classroom, the least written about, and the least known in general by the North American public. Yet, it added more to the national treasury and to the land mass of the United States than all other wars combined.

After the conflict, which was resolved in the way that US had wished, so much new area was opened up, so many targets had been accomplished, that a mood of self-congregation and enthusiasm took root in the United States. The deserters from the war were soon forgotten as they homesteaded and labored in the gold fields of California or, as the 1860s approached, put on the gray uniform of the Confederacy or the blue one of the Union. Prejudice against the Irish waned, as the country was provided with a “pressure valve” to release many of its new

immigrants westward. “*San Patricios*” disappeared from the US history and their tale was abandoned, until recently, to the dusty bowels of US military archives in Washington.

However, the legend of the “*San Patricios*” remained alive and their story has been told in books, reviews, documentaries, even a feature film “*One Man's Hero*”, a 1999 historical war drama film directed by Lance Hool and starring Tom Berenger, Joaquim de Almeida and Daniela Romo. About the only place on earth that one won't find it is in American history textbooks, most of which omit any reference to the “*San Patricios*”. That is not surprising. You can't tell the story of the heroes without commenting the atrocities that prompted them to cross battle lines. The preferred version of those US historians who do engage the story is that these conscientious objectors were little more than disoriented deserters who, one day, drank too much and stumbled across enemy lines.

The legacy of “*San Patricios*” depends largely on the side you are looking at. In the United States, their legacy as one of the only enemy units composed almost entirely of deserters is ostracized, with attempts at the time to dismiss the Battalion's very existence as some kind of propaganda exercise. The US Army long denied the existence of the Saint Patrick's Battalion as a cover-up and an attempt to discourage other potential deserters. In 1915, an inquiry was initiated by US congressmen William Henry Coleman and Frank L. Greene. This resulted in the US Army's admitting its denial of the matter. The US Congress ordered the army to turn over its records on the battalion to the National Archives. However, this did not change much the “*San Patricios*” consideration in the US. In 1999, MGM cancelled the US distribution of the film depicting the battalion “*One Man's Hero*” with Tom Berenger playing John Riley.

It should also be noted that in the US, the memory of the Saint Patrick's Battalion was shameful for many Irish Americans, who were eager to blend in with US society and attain all the benefits and opportunities for which they had fled Ireland. Indeed, over the next century and a half they would largely realize this dream, as the prejudice and discrimination against them became less and less common. In Ireland, however, the “*San Patricios*” are remembered more fondly. According to Michael Hogan, author of the “*The Irish Soldiers of Mexico*”, a novel edited in 1977 and which served as a reference to the movie “*One Man's Hero*”: “*despite their whippings, mutilations, and hangings, or perhaps because of them, [they] became a symbol in Mexico not of disgrace, but of honor in defeat, of glory in death*”.

In Mexico, the “*San Patricios*” are still, to this day, revered as heroes who chose the right side of history. “*El Batallón de San Patricio*” is memorialized on two separate days: 12 September, the generally accepted anniversary of the executions of those battalion members captured by the US Army, and 17 March, Saint Patrick's Day. A Commemorative plaque listing the names of seventy-one soldiers was placed at the San Jacinto Plaza in the district of San Angel, Mexico City, in 1959. The plaque was designed by Lorenzo Rafael, son of Patricio Cox, who wrote the first book, a novel in Spanish, about the “*San Patricios*”. The heraldry at the top of the plaque depicts a Celtic cross protected by the outstretched wings of the Aztec eagle. The inscription on the plaque reads: “*In memory of the Irish soldiers of the heroic San Patricio Battalion, martyrs who gave their lives for the cause of Mexico during the unjust US invasion of 1847*”. At the bottom of the plaque another inscription reads: “*With the*

gratitude of Mexico, 112 years after their holocaust". Numerous schools, churches and other landmarks in Mexico take their name from the battalion. In Mexico City, the street in front of the Santa María de Churubusco convent was named "*Mártires Irlandeses*" (The Irish martyrs). The inscription "*Defensores de la Patria 1846-1848 y Batallón de San Patricio*" [Defenders of the Motherland 1846-1848 and the San Patricio Battalion] was inscribed in gold letters on the Wall of Honor in Mexico's Chamber of Deputies, following a ceremony of the LVII Mexican Congress held on Thursday, October 28, 2002. In 2004, at an official ceremony attended by numerous international dignitaries including directors, as well as several actors from the MGM film "*One Man's Hero*" (1999), the Mexican government gave a commemorative statue to the Irish government in perpetual thanks for the bravery, honor and sacrifice of the Saint Patrick's Battalion. The statue was erected in **Clifden**, Connemara, Galway County, Ireland, where leader John Riley was born. In honor of John Riley, on 12 September the town of Clifden flies the Mexican flag.

Regardless of moral judgements on their existence, the Saint Patrick's Battalion and its commander showcased exemplary military discipline in the Mexican army that lacked such a thing in most of its other units, and in comparison to other Irish military adventures in the new world, they proved that Irish fighters could maintain the kind of ferocious reputation they had earned on European battlefields. John Riley sums up what cannot be clearly documented in any history: the basic, gut-level affinity the Irishman had then, and still has today, for Mexico and its people. The decisions of the men who joined the "*San Patricios*" were probably not well-planned or thought out. They were impulsive and emotional, like many of Ireland's own rebellions. Nevertheless, the courage of the "*San Patricios*", their loyalty to their new cause, and their unquestioned bravery forged an indelible seal of honor on their sacrifice.

John Riley was not forgotten in Mexico, neither were his men. The people of the district of San Angel in Mexico City raised a monument to the "*San Patricios*" after the war. It was a cross bearing three images: a gamecock, a pair of dice, a skull and crossbones. The imagery was summed up best by the historian **Edward S. Wallace** in 1950: "*These unfortunate men were brave and fought, gambled, and lost*". In 1960, a commemorative medallion was struck in honor of the "*San Patricios*": "*Con la gratitud de Mexico a los 113 años de su sacrificio*" (With the thanks of Mexico on the 113th anniversary of their deaths). On its face are the national coat of arms, Mexico's eagle and serpent, and an Irish cross. Unlike the grim symbols of the cross of San Angel, this one is decorated with sea horses and wolfhounds, and it is inscribed: "*Al Heroico Batallón de San Patricio, 1847*". On the reverse "*Un soldado irlandés con la vista fuera*" (A grim-faced Irish soldier) leads his men to the stockades at the Río Churubusco. In the background stand a heavy cannon and the walls of the "Convento de San Pablo". There are no words inscribed on that side of the coin.

In Mexico no redundant words are necessary (*quote from the legendary Mexican Revolution General Pancho Villa*).

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Brussels, May 2017

Image N° 3 : Commemorative plaque to the memory of the Saint Patrick's Battalion, in San Jacinto Plaza, San Angel, Mexico City



Image N° 4 : John Riley Memorial, Clifden, Connemara, County Galway, Ireland



Image N° 5 : Monument to John Riley in San Jacinto Plaza, San Angel, Mexico City



Images N° 6 & 7 : Flag and commemorative medallion of the "San Patricios"



Images N° 8 & 9 : Saint Patrick of Ireland, Catholic & Orthodox style

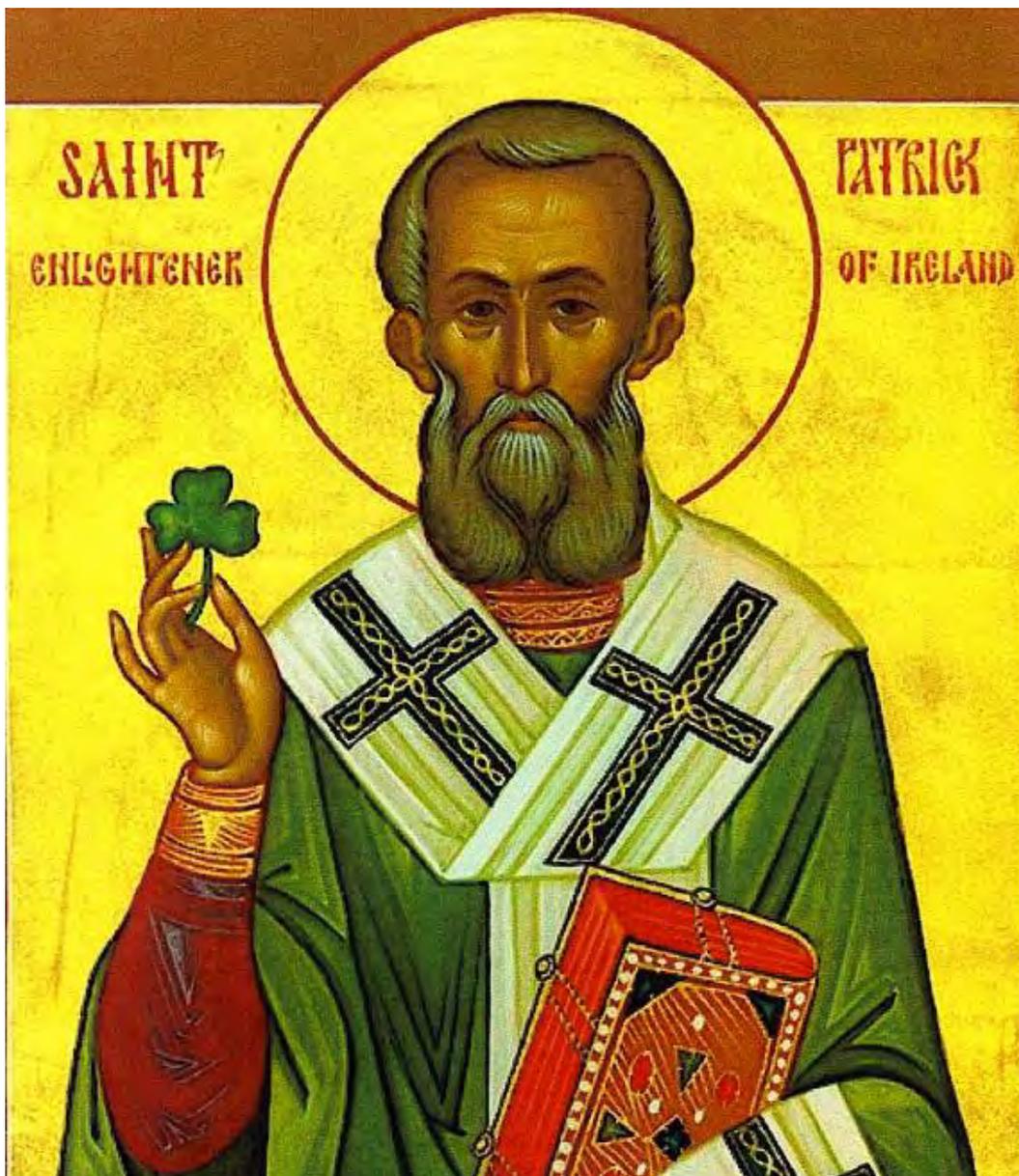


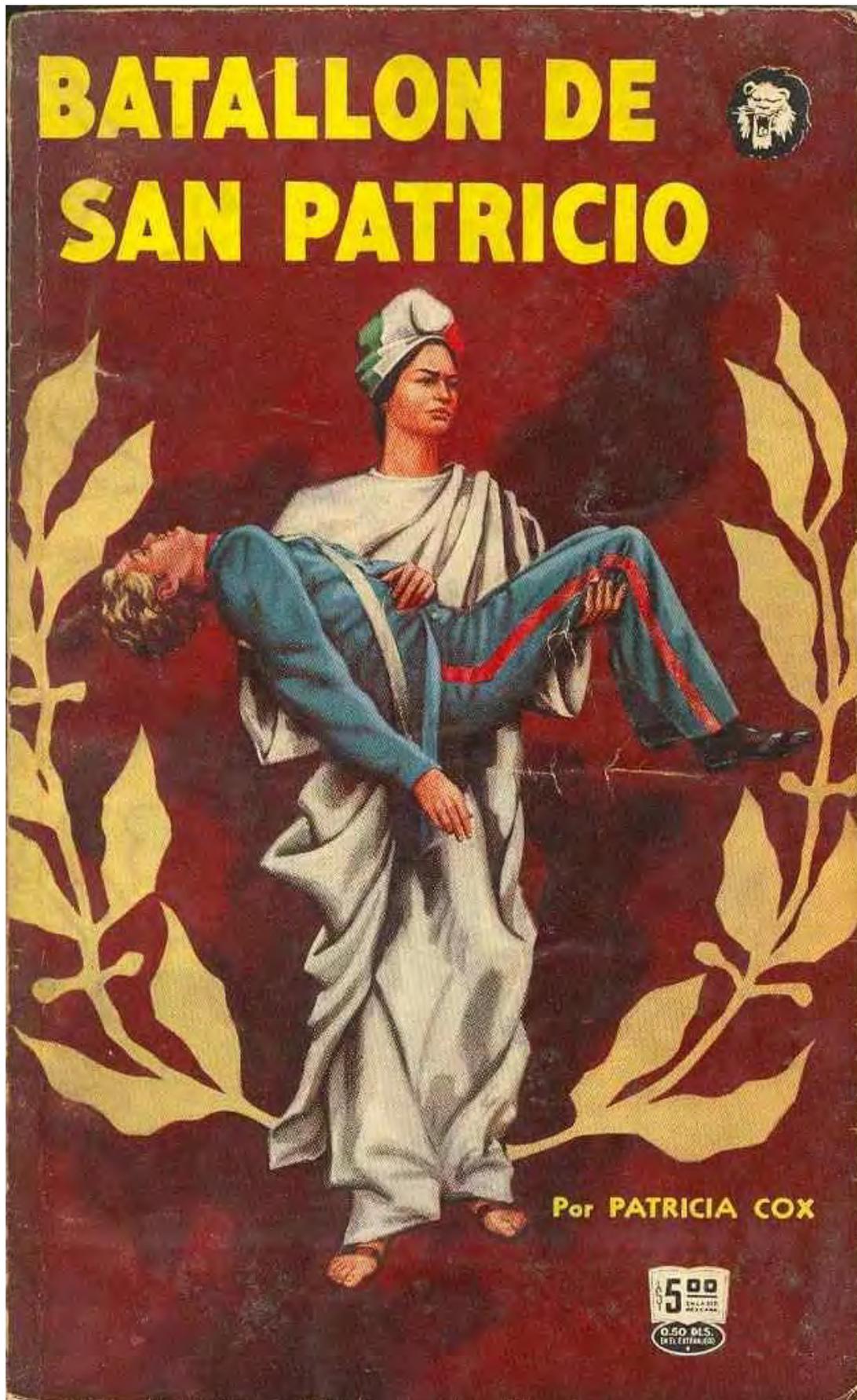
Image N° 10 : Battle of Buena Vista, February 22-23, 1847



Image N° 11 : Battle of Churubusco, August 19-20, 1847



Image N° 12 : "Batallón de San Patricio", Patricia Cox, Editorial La Prensa, México, 1963



Dr. Angel ANGELIDIS: *JOHN RILEY AND THE BATTALION "SAN PATRICIO" - THE IRISH HEROS WHO FOUGHT FOR MEXICO IN THE NAME OF SAINT PATRICK*, DOC AA-44 EN-05-2017

Images N° 13 - 16 : Books about John Riley and the "San Patricios"

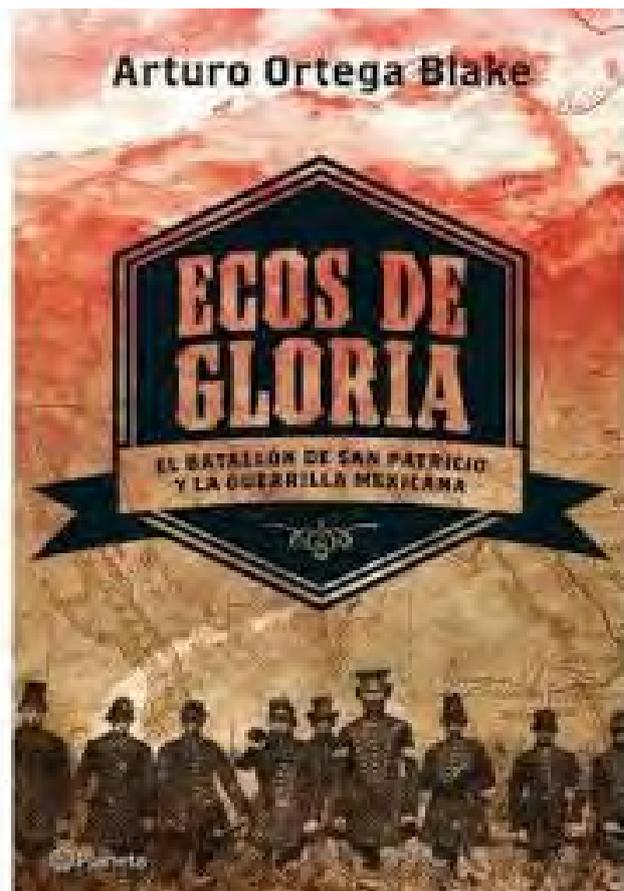
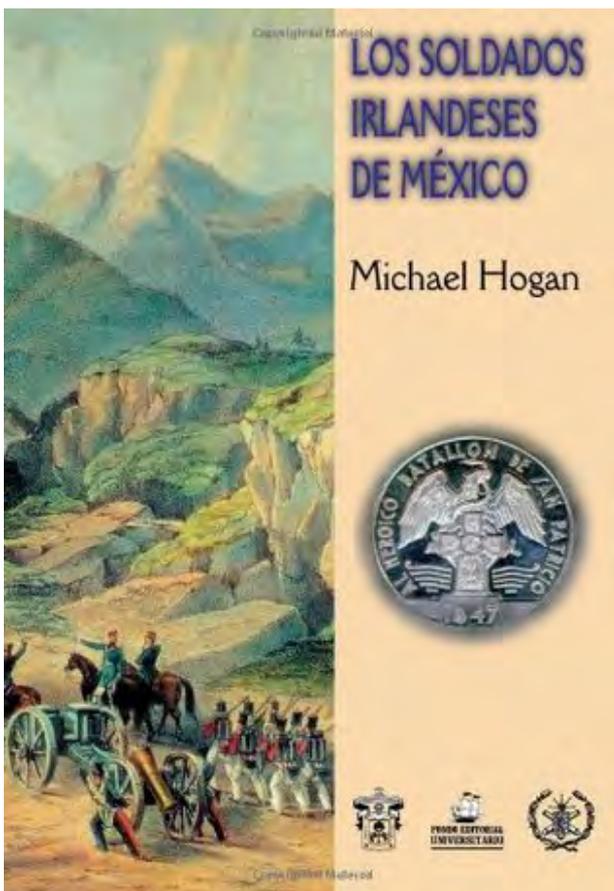
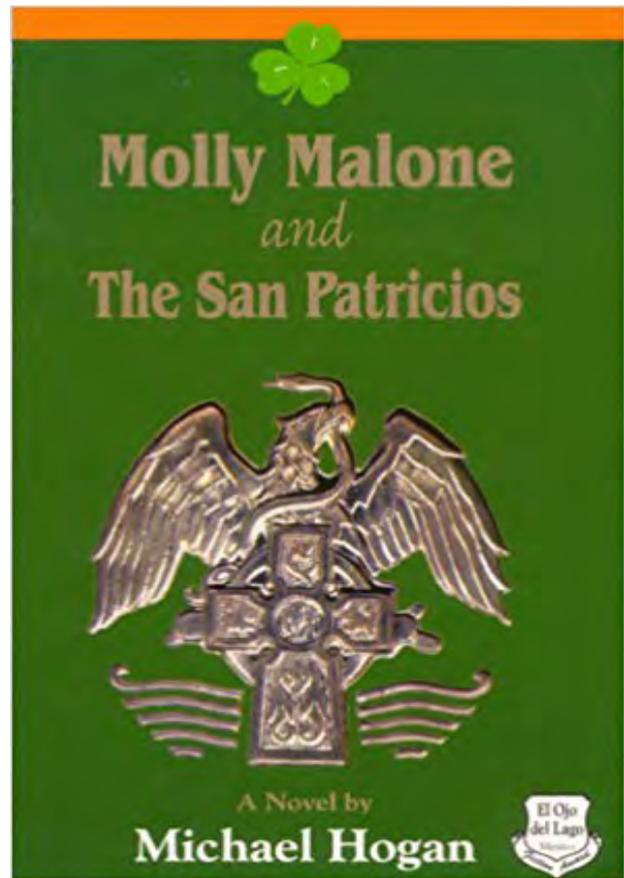
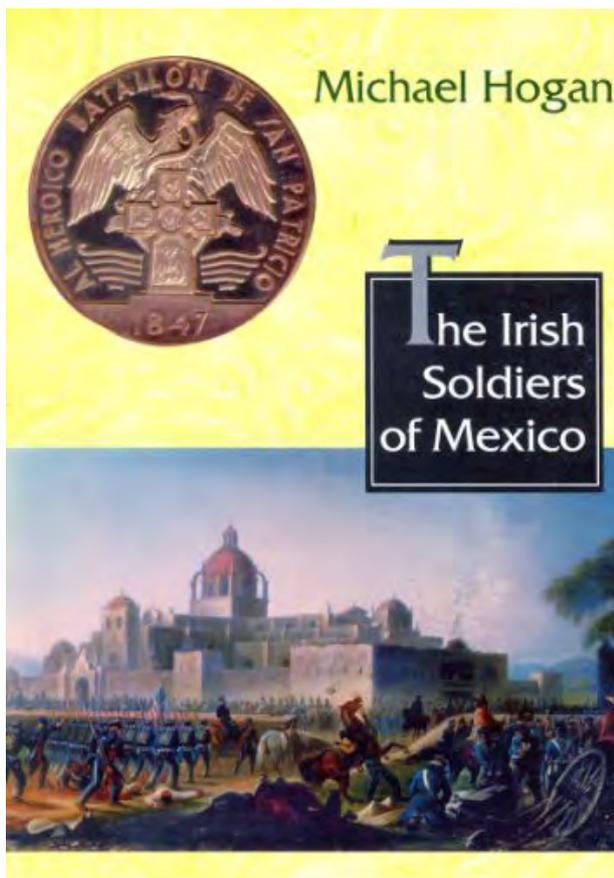
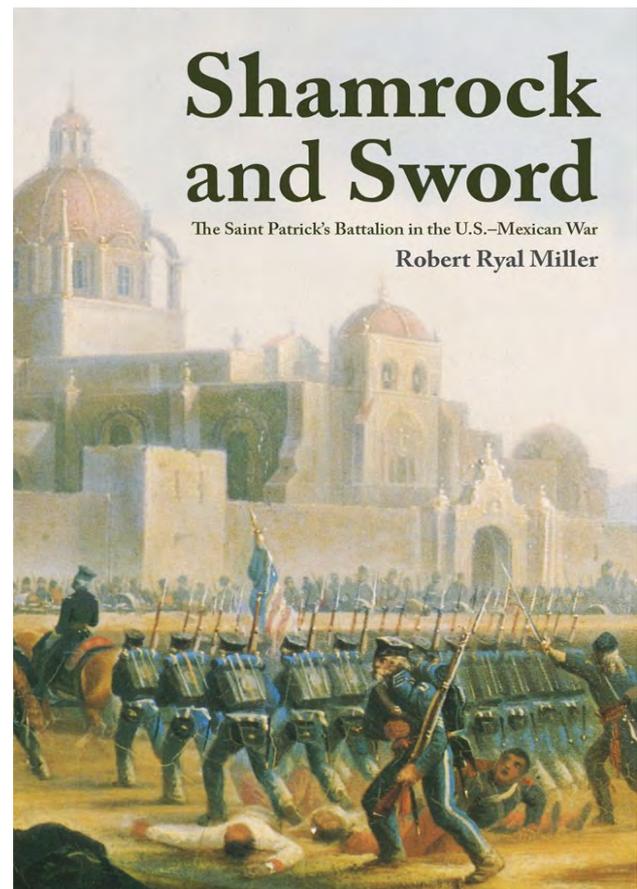
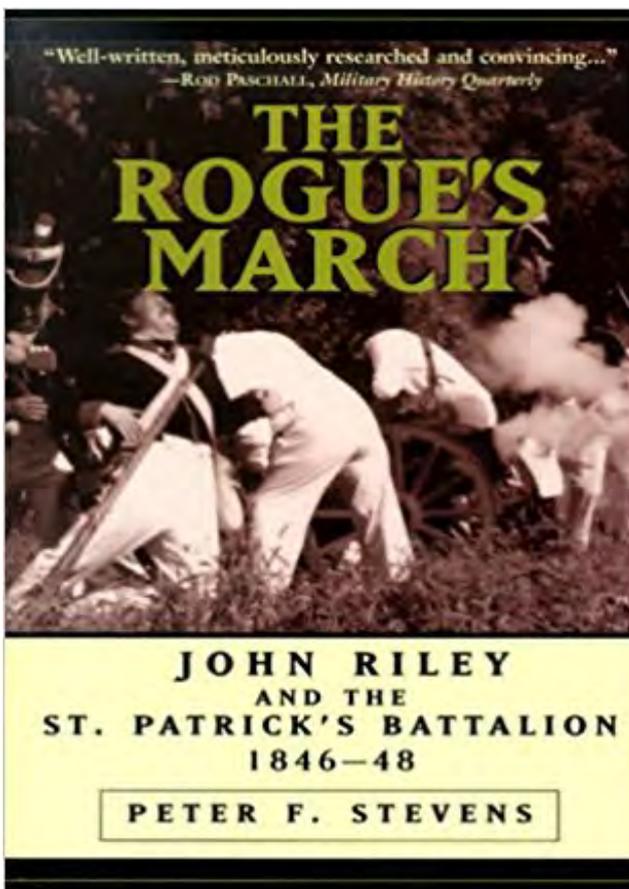
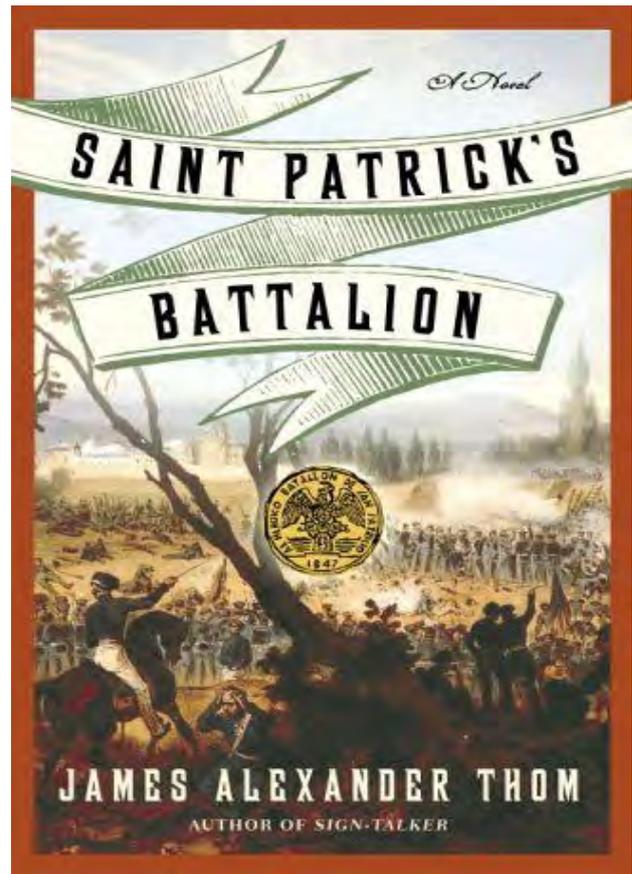


Image N° 17 - 20 : Books about John Riley and the "San Patricios"

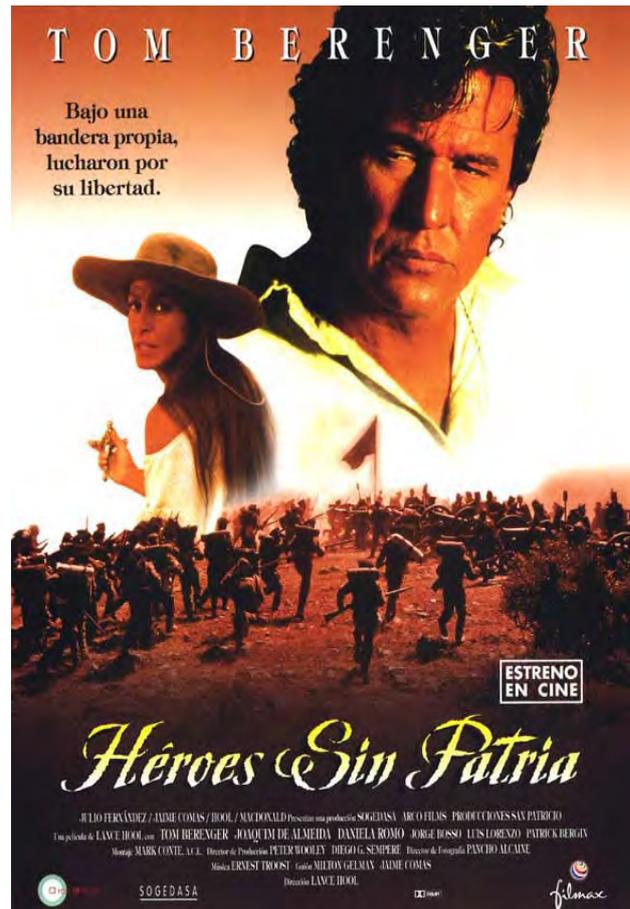


Images N° 21 - 23 : Tom Berenger playing John Riley in «One Man's Hero», 1999



85 were captured. 48 were hanged. The rest were whipped and then branded with cattle irons.

Although contrary to the Rules of War at the time, the San Patricios were whipped with 50 lashes, branded with red-hot irons, then sentenced to hard labor for the duration of the war. Major John Riley was branded twice because the first one was upside down.



Maps N° 1 & 2 : Mexican territories seized by the US, 1835-1853



Image N° 24 : Battle of Monterrey, September 20, 1946



AVERTISSEMENT

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