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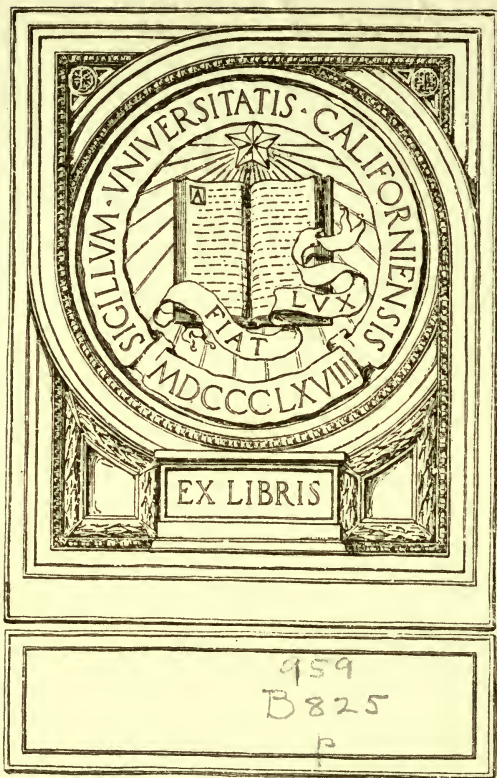


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# PANAMA ROUGHNECK BALLADS



JOHN HALL



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# Panama Roughneck Ballads

BY  
JOHN HALL

PUBLISHED BY

ALBERT LINDO

PANAMA RAILROAD NEWS AGENCY  
PANAMA AND CANAL ZONE

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## INTRODUCTION

This little book is dedicated to the men in the "Big Ditch," as the Panama Canal, now rapidly nearing completion, is called.

The terms "roughneck" and "husky" are not used in a disparaging sense; on the contrary, the author is inspired by feelings of respect and friendship for the brave, hardy fellows who are facing the countless dangers attendant upon such a gigantic undertaking as the piercing of the Isthmus of Panama and the joining of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

A feeble effort has been made to give the outside world an idea of the type of man now carrying to realization the dream of the lamented de Lesseps and the crowning ambition of the mighty Republic of the West. They are wonderful! Since the dawn of history no such body of builders has been brought together, and, probably never will again.

It has been the privilege of the writer of these lines to live among these men for five years. He has found them men—men "in the rough;" big-hearted and courageous unto recklessness; laughing at the nearness of death, and dying when their time

## Introduction

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came, determined to face the "Grim Reaper" without flinching.

Much has been written about the excellent health conditions in the Canal Zone, and great credit is due the Sanitary Department of the I. C. C. The country traversed by the Canal has been made habitable. But Panama is Panama; and the hardy Northmen, despite their sanitary surroundings, are sweating under an alien sun whose rays act strangely upon them at times.

The canal diggers earn every dollar they receive. They are risking their lives every day of the year. Comparatively few have gone the disease route, when we think of the awful days of the French. But when one of the big fellows goes he goes like a shot: Blast or Blackwater, it's all the same.

Here's to you, my brave brothers! May those of you who have "stuck to the job" be present at the opening, and have the great satisfaction of seeing your years of hard work rewarded by beholding the commerce of the world safely passing over the ground baptized with your sweat—aye, your blood! And forever hallowed as the last resting place of those who fell in the battle.



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## “ROUGHNECK’S” LOVE LAY

As I sit and hear the calling  
Of the jungle folk at night,  
While the dewdrops, gently falling,  
Mark the fleeting hours’ quick flight.

As the little midnight greetings  
Sound from mate to mate,  
To me come back our meetings  
At the rustic garden gate.

Lovers’ songs I hear a-ringing  
From the smoothly flowing brook;  
To their lady loves they’re singing  
From each fragrance-laden nook.

’Neath the Southern Cross, soft gleaming,  
From the azure-painted dome

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I sit here ever dreaming  
Of a sweet face back at home.

When the day's hard toil is over,  
And the stars shine from above,  
I can sense the swaying clover  
And my thoughts return to love.

Jungle sweethearts, ever singing  
To their lady loves at night:  
I can hear the church bells ringing,  
And with joy my soul's alight.

Mystic elfins of the gloaming,  
Your songs my heart doth thrill,  
For they tell me you are homing  
From flowing brook and jagged hill.

So shall I some day a-homing  
Swiftly make a joyous flight,  
And I'll end my days of roaming,  
Little sweethearts of the night.

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### THE "LURE OF THE TROPICS"

The "Lure of the Tropics" one hears of so frequently works its seductive influence here in old Panama, holding its victims happy prisoners.

When the cities of what will be the terminals of the Panama Canal were quagmires, men spoke of "The lure of the Tropics" as they leaped across green-coated pools and dodged the flying mud from passing vehicles. Now that the fairy wand of the engineer has been waved over Colon and Panama, and God's pure air is free from the scents from accumulated human and other filth, the "Lure of the Tropics" in these parts is a real thing; and if its enchanting spell has been proportionately increased in power, it is because the hand of man has joined forces with Nature, the result being that man himself has fallen deeper into the power of the balmy influence of the rain-cooled zephyrs, from blue seas and warm sun rays of even temperature in the midst of all the conveniences of modern civilization. What was once called a "pest hole" is now termed a

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“health resort” by the world’s greatest sanitation expert.

“Human derelicts,” “tropical tramps,” “vagabonds,” etc., are the names given to those victims of the “lure of the Tropics” who relax body and soul and surrender absolutely to the Enchantress.

Panama has its share of these; huge, hairy Anglo-Saxons, who sprawl in the warm sunshine along the waterfront, flirting with the brown-eyed “cholitas,” and sharing their last dime with the little sons of the country, whose skins are of all shades, from that rich brown which gives the “cholita” her charm (which is one of the principal lures of the tropics) to the deepest ebony, hereditary hue of the son of Ethiopia.

Happy vagabonds! They nourish their weary bodies with the succulent plantain, and an occasional heaping dish of “frijoles,” and, now and then, a little beef—and all the rum they can lay their hands on. The last is their ticket to the “long rest” in the land from whence no traveler hath returned, to date.

The “Lure of the Tropics” is a dangerous thing when the moral structure of the native of colder

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climes is frail. Now and then a Canal Man gets caught; but being of the right kind, he fights free again and goes back to his clean quarters and substantial food, and starts a new collection of postal money orders.

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### THE OLD CANAL MAN

The Old Canal Man—What is he? He is a wanderer over the face of the earth, and the knocks he has received have endowed him with a goodly stock of worldly wisdom. He has hunted polar bears in the Arctic regions and wild hogs in the Tropics; prospected for gold from Patagonia to Dawson, and jumped from irrigation work in the Arizona desert to harvesting ice in Maine. He is a man whose experience has taught him many things, principal of which is a fair knowledge of his kind—man. The Old Canal Man is one of the few hundred who are at the point of the wedge in the canal work.

Rough he is—rough of countenance and speech, but, like his kind the world over, always ready to share his last biscuit and slice of bacon with a hungry fellow traveler on Life's highway. He is simple in thought and action, as all hard-working, honest men are. The struggle for survival has prevented him acquiring the craftiness of the scheming idler. But he is shrewd! and the hard life he leads

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has seasoned his shrewdness with philosophy—the philosophy of real life—not of books. He detests the false note in the voice of the rogue, and observes instantly the furtive look in his eye—and hates him accordingly. His mind is an open book, and if yours is as open he is your friend at once, without going through the formality of asking your name.

There are many of the “Old Canal Man” in the “Big Ditch:” They are the men who put the dynamite in the holes that tear away the sides of the mountains; who guide the ponderous steel buckets of the snorting steam shovels; man the great powerful locomotives that haul the spoil to the distant dump, handle the trains, build the concrete locks and spillways, and a multitude of other outdoor things that must be done before the first ship noses her way from Colon to Panama through what will be officially known as the Panama Canal.

Come sunshine, come rain; be it midday or midnight, he is on the spot doing the necessary thing to keep the great machine running smoothly: And he does it, though he goes to the hospital the next day, and to the grave the day after.

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It is not a characteristic of the Old Canal Man's breed to consider consequences: He goes after results and lets consequences take care of themselves. His judgment sometimes proves to be bad judgment; but when his average of results is struck, the men at the head of things try to forget his occasional sprees and sometimes pointed speech. The mark of toil is upon him, and he is not ashamed of it. On the contrary, in his gruffly hearty way he takes pride in his gnarled fists and sun-tanned, seamy visage. He is fully conscious of his power, and sells his brawn at a good price, always to the highest bidder, if the job is "on the square." His stock in trade is the force that unites oceans and spans continents; and if he does this on a diet of strong drink and coarse food, it proves the man, in his own opinion, and sometimes that of wiser men.

The Old Canal Man is a gambler born. He sometimes thinks he gambles for gain, as do all other inveterate gamblers, who are really toilers—men who work. No real gambler works. All professional gamblers treat the very mention of regular manual effort with scorn. The Old Canal Man gambles because his nature craves the excitement of



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the game; the battle of the wits that wages furiously when a big "jackpot" is at stake is meat to him, and he goes to the fray atingle with the nervous excitement of the chase. What he seeks is victory—always victory; to beat the other fellow—and then hand him a gold piece on the sly when he sees him leaving the game "cleaned." He can't resist the silent appeal of a man who is making a game attempt to conceal the fact that he is "down and out."

"Soldier of fortune" is the name his fellow men have given the Old Canal Man. Some of them who have spent much time in the Tropics, wandering from place to place, dub themselves "tropical tramps." The word "tramp" is objectionable, because it has an ugly significance in many quarters. The friends of the Old Canal Man would rather call him a soldier of fortune, and let it go at that. For he is a soldier of fortune. The fight he fights outranks in importance the achievements of all the wholesale butchers of humans who have crimsoned the pages of history with the blood of their kind, from the proud Alexander "The Great" to the "Little Corporal."

The Old Canal Man has come to the canal from

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the four quarters of the earth, and the good pay, comfortable quarters and skilled medical treatment he finds in the employ of bountiful Uncle Sam have induced him to stay long enough to qualify himself for the title of Old Canal Man. And it is thus we find him. His views on the canal and the men who are "putting the ditch through" are both interesting and instructive, and it is good to listen to him, for one reason if no other—he is not what is known as a "knocker." He knows his own weak points as well as he knows his strength—and he wants you to forget them, and, in return, he is willing to forget yours and the other fellow's.

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### THE CRAVEN

Once upon a time there drifted,  
With the crowd that hard luck sifted,  
To the place of bugs and reptiles,  
Where the "huskies" toiled and swore,  
He of grouch great and growing,  
Wide awake and fully knowing;  
Came to make his home there  
By the deep Pacific's green-clad shore.  
"Tell them," wrote the "kicker" swiftly;  
"Tell my friends I'm mighty sore,  
And I'll come back—nevermore."  
Quoth the craven: "Nevermore!"

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### AS IT WAS

'Way down in Colon town,  
The land of the gambler clan.  
'Way down in Colon town,  
Where they "trim" the roughneck man.  
Where night's turned into day,  
And the "live-ones'" coin goes fast:  
Where the suckers like to play;  
Where the "gringo" hates the past.  
Where mateless men soon mate;  
Where siren's song sounds sweet;  
Where jeering men mock Fate;  
Where siren's life is fleet.  
Where water man ne'er craves,  
And beer the drunkard spurns,  
And adds one to the graves  
When wine his liver burns.  
'Way down in Colon town  
Where Mongol mates with Turk;  
Where white man's skin is brown;  
Where white-slave traders lurk.



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### LAY OF THE "ROUGH-NECK"

"They told me of fevers an' reptyles ;  
They told me th' land was a hell,  
An' warned me away from a garden,  
A beautiful flower-clad dell."

"There's sunshine an' cool early mornin's,  
An' nights full of fragrance an' sleep.  
Now I know why advice is a burden  
That folks ain't willin' to keep."

"They pass it on to the next man,  
Though his plans need no help from outside ;  
An' he'd rather they'd tell him the good things,  
An' leave him alone to decide."

"I don't see nothin' I'm scared of ;  
Th' fever ain't come to me, yet.  
Th' reptyles ain't lookin' for trouble—  
Neither am I, you can bet."

"I get all th' grub I can gobble ;  
An' th' pay's mighty good, in my mind,

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I aint kickin' for somethin' to kick at;  
I aint of the kick-likin' kind."

"Will we dig th' 'ditch'? Well, I reckon!  
Th' question's a joke to us all.  
This job aint a big bluff, 'amigo';  
Take it from me; nor a 'stall'."

"We're glidin' an' slidin' on nicely,  
'Mid th' toot an' th' hoot an' th' blast;  
An' you'll wake some day an' hear th' world say,  
'Uncle Sam's got th' "ditch" through at last.'"

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### IN THE LAND OF THE MANGO

Far away in the land of the mango,  
Where the monkey and 'gator dwell,  
And the bright-eyed lizard basks 'neath the tropic  
sun;  
Where Anopheles and Red Bug make life a living-  
well!  
And malaria claims its victims, one by one.

In the land of the dark-skinned maiden,  
Where the "Gringo" buys his love,  
And blue eyes sometimes shine 'neath crispy hair,  
Where the boa-constrictor slumbers in the mango  
tree above;  
And the panther drags his victim to his lair.

Where the ever-creeping jungle,  
Moves forward day by day,  
And fights the work of man from sea to sea;  
Where the cry of the man who toils not  
Is "Pay! Pay! More Pay!"  
And the pickaninnies sport in naked glee.



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### THE "ROUGH-NECK" BREED

Two "rough-necks" grimly sloshing through the  
Panama Canal,  
Wotting not of falling rain and sticky mud,  
Fell to "cussing," and then joshing, as man to man  
and "pal" to "pal"  
About the rainy season and the flood.

"To-morrow is Thanksgivin'," quoth the cheerful  
one with joy,  
"Aint ye thankful that ye aint on Ancon Hill?"  
Said the other, 'I'm a livin, my frisky, fair-haired  
boy,  
If I 'croak' Uncle Sam will foot th' bill."

Two "rough-necks," just two "huskies," on the  
Panama Canal,  
Wotting not of falling rain and sticky mud.  
They're the breed, sweat-soaked and musky,  
Who ask a drink, a sleep, a "gal,"  
A "feed"; and laugh at wind, and rain, and flood.

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“FORWARD, MARCH!”

Came the soldier from the Army;  
    Came the man of stripes and bars;  
To the “big Ditch” came the soldier,  
    Full of plans for strife and war.

All the “rough-necks” eyed the soldier,  
    Eyed him from the front and rear  
They eyed him and they weighed him,  
    As they chaffed and quaffed their beer.

Spake the soldier from the rostrum,  
    Spake he sharp, and loud, and clear,  
“You’re the Army; I’m the General.  
    Now to battle with a cheer.”

“Now forward to Culebra,  
    Old Gatun and P. Miguel.  
On, my lads, on to battle;  
    Make the dirt fly; give ’em hell!”

On they struggled, ever onward,  
    Blasting stone, and earth, and men;

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Filling rivers with razed mountains;  
Filling graves with parts of men.

Blood and bone are mixed with concrete.  
Sweat of brow and grime of toil  
Mark the "rough-neck" as he swelters,  
Weary 'mid the grease and oil.

Weary flesh, nor fever's terrors  
Halt them as they onward go.  
"Forward! Forward! Ever Forward!  
Is the only cry they know.

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### THE STEAM SHOVEL

Dig! Dig! Dig!

All the hot day long.

Dig! Dig! Dig!

Is the burden of their song.

Sweating "husky" at the lever,

Cursing falling rain and fever,

As the shovel crawls along.

Dig! Dig! Dig!

From sea to sea they go.

Dig! Dig! Dig!

'Neath the burning sun's fierce glow.

Coal and water are their muscle;

Make the weary firemen hustle.

Human misery they don't know.

Dig! Dig! Dig!

Flesh and bone. Steel and steam.

Dig! Dig! Dig!

Roar of blasting. Whistle's scream.

Ever to their puny master

Roar the shovels—Faster! Faster!

Muscle! Muscle! Steam! More Steam!

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### “SPICKETY BILL”

“Bill” Hicks was a steam-shovel man,  
His records gave “Bill” great renown.  
It was great to watch “Bill” tear down a hill,  
As the bucket swung up and came down.

The “huskies” swore “Bill” was a wonder;  
A marvel of skill in his line.  
He’d swear by the clock as he loaded the rock  
That he’d “rather pull levers than dine.”

The shovel “Bill” loved like a brother.  
To all else his mind was a blank.  
He made his friends “sore” and they openly swore  
That “Bill” was a “loony old crank.”

Now “Bill” hated women like “pizen.”  
The sight of one gave him a shock,  
'Till Juancita, petite, in stockingless feet,  
Came to see the “gringoes” “shoot” rock.

The little brown “spick” gazed in wonder  
Such sights she ne’er had beheld.

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Her gaze fell on "Bill," and he felt a great thrill,  
But his case-hardened spirit rebelled.

It was fun to watch "Bill" as he floundered,  
As the "spick" looked into his soul.  
He was "caught on the hook" as in mad rage he  
shook;  
And his language was shockingly foul.

"Bill" swore by the mountains he sundered:  
He swore by the foot and the yard,  
That he'd "stick to his gun, rather than run,  
And, like a brave man, he'd die hard."

Juancita just smiled at the "hombre;"  
As he growled and frowned in her face.  
But she knew she had "Bill," and simply stood still,  
As his high-sounding talk grew apace.

In "poco tiempo" "Bill" felt rather sorry.  
From his seat he climbed to the ground.  
"Como'stah," he said; and he grew awful red,  
"Mighty glad to see you 'round."

Juancita was flattered and flustered.  
"Muy bien, señor," she replied.

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Thus met she and "Bill" on the side of the hill,  
And the love that they knew never died.

As "Spickety Bill" from that meeting

He was known all over the "line."

"Bill" stuck to the "gal" and made her his "pal,"

And said she was "dandy and fine."

One day "Bill" was breaking a record,

When hell "cut loose" in his front.

We found poor "Bill" on top of the hill,

As he "cashed in his checks" with a grunt.

We buried poor "Bill" like a Christian,

With the others that died by the blast.

Juancita was there, all grief and despair,

Praying for "Bill" low and fast.

Now "Bill" was a hardened old sinner,

Who didn't know women's soft ways;

But the "spickety" "gal" he took for a "pal"

Sheds tears where he lies—and prays.

There's more like "Bill," old-timer;

Helping to dig this big hole,

Who'll go swearing away, day after day,

'Till some woman looks into their soul."

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### “MRS. MAC-DASHER”

“Happy the lot of the man who is married,  
With nice little house and furniture free;  
Awful the lot of the chump who has tarried,  
And turned from the road to fee-lici-tee.”

“Single men think to be free is a pleasure,  
And go and come as they will;  
But here in the Zone a woman’s a pleasure,  
And rich Uncle Sam foots the big bill.”

A “husky” thus mused as he thought of the pleasure  
Of life in a house, “type 70-’steen;”  
With no rent to pay, and no coal to measure;  
So he schemed a wild and villainous scheme.

He hied him away to the haunts of the Sirens,  
And picked out a beautiful fancy-free maid;  
Like a fish on the land, she disliked her environs,  
And balked for a time, but finally stayed.

It was “Mrs. Mac-Dasher, who came by the  
steamer;  
Just down from the ‘States,’ late yesterday”;



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But the lady next door, when she had seen her,  
Decided at once to move far away.

The "gumshoe" soon "spotted" the whole situation,  
And chuckled with glee as he quietly spoke :  
"We'll go, 'Dotty' dear, to the near railroad station.  
This certainly is a rich little joke."

The "husky," a victim of deep meditation,  
Received this message by two o'clock mail :  
"We think it is time you took a vacation ;  
Let us know by return when you can sail."

He took the vacation, without hesitation,  
And sailed on the boat leaving next day.  
This cable then came : "Send in resignation ;  
We mail you to-morrow a draft for your pay."

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### “JACK” IN PANAMA

Note—A deep-water sailor was “touched” in our town last night.

“Jack” ashore, for fun galore,  
Is a sight you often see;  
A tale I’ll tell of a heavy “swell,”  
If you’ll harken unto me.

He fell in love with an octoroon.

Ye ho! me lads, Ye ho!

She told a tale ’neath the silvery moon.

Ye ho! me lads, Ye ho!

Her sails were neat, and her lines were trim.

Ye ho! me lads, Ye ho!

Her voice was soft, and her hand was slim.

Ye ho! me lads, Ye ho!

She wasn’t slow, and told him so,

When he wanted to go.

Ye ho! me lads, Ye ho!

He reached below, and felt for his ‘dough.’

Ye ho! me lads, Ye ho!

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He hadn't a cent, and the air was rent.

Ye ho! me lads, Ye ho!

He roared and howled, and bawled and yowled.

Ye ho! me lads, Ye ho!

How she did the trick, in manner slick,

Made the poor old "jack-tar" sick.

Ye ho! me lads, Ye ho!

He weighed his "hook," and the lady he "shook."

Ye ho! me lads, Ye ho!

Alas, poor "Jack;" he'll never come back.

Ye ho! me lads, Ye ho!

When last seen he was headed east-north-east,  
bound for some channel that would lead him back  
to deep water.