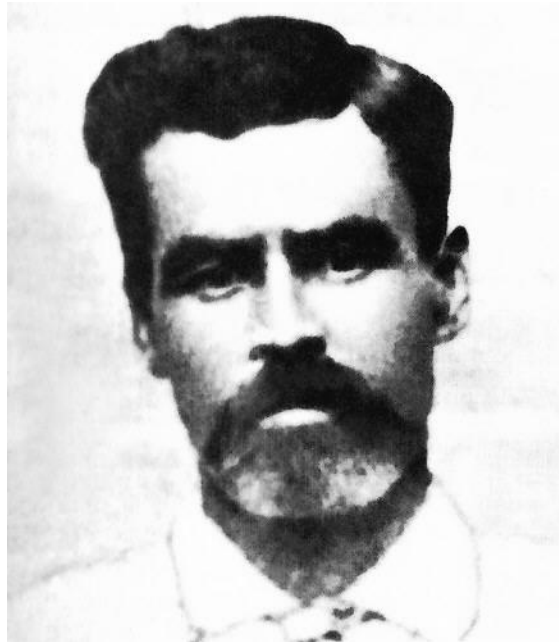


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Augustine Chacon

Twenty years after he was hanged, the November 22, 1922 edition of *The Arizona Republican* called Augustine Chacon, "One of the most blackest hearted villains that ever operated in the southwest." According to Arizona's Official State Historian Marshall Trimble, Chacon was "one of the last of the hard-riding desperados who rode the owl-hoot trail in Arizona around the turn of the century." And to some along the border he was even considered to be a "Robin Hood." There is little doubt that he was a vicious killer and bragged of killing 15 Americans and 37 Mexicans.

Chacon was born in Sonora, Mexico, and the year is most often given as 1861. As an adult he reached a height of over six feet and he was given the nick name of or "The Hairy One" because of the thick black hair that covered his body, including a very heavy beard and moustache.



Augustine "El Peludo" Chacon

He was not always a bad guy as he is first recorded in history as being a peace officer in the Sierra del Tigre area of Sonora. He is also said to have served with the Mexican Border Patrol. He worked as a vaquero (Mexican cowboy) before moving to Morenci, Arizona, in 1888 when he was hired as a cowboy on Ben Ollney's ranch. He was respected by his co-workers and by Ollney until the day when El Peludo claimed his pay envelope was short. He got into a heated discussion with the boss and when Ollney reached for his pistol he was too slow. While the boss lay dying in the dust the other hands rushed to his rescue and five of them were killed by Chacon before he fled.

He managed to remain on the run for several months and then was recognized near Fort Apache. There a band of vigilantes threw him in jail and promised a dawn lynching. However, all that was found in his cell the next morning was some hacksaw blades and the bars from his cell. Some believed that Ollney's daughter Nellie, who always believed him to be innocent, provided the tools for his escape.

For the next few years Chacon was mostly hiding in Mexico where he was smuggling horses and cattle back and forth across the border. In early 1884 he returned to Morenci. Shortly afterward two clerks from the Detroit Copper Company were enjoying a couple of days camping on Eagle Creek where they were hunting and fishing. When a gang of bandits

TOMBSTONE BY TOMBSTONE

wanted their guns and equipment the young men stood no chance. There were no witnesses, but everyone was certain that Chacon and his gang were guilty of the needless slaughter.

He spent a little time in Tombstone until Sheriff John Slaughter heard he was staying with a friend in a tent outside of town. Slaughter and his deputy, Burt Alvord, were determined to arrest him. Alvord covered the front of the tent and Slaughter the back of it. When Chacon came dashing out of the back of the tent Slaughter was sure he shot him, but in the pitch dark Chacon managed to escape.

Back in Morenci around Christmastime of 1895 Chacon would commit the most famous/infamous cold-blooded murder of his many killings. On the evening of December 15th (occasionally reported as Christmas Eve), Paul Becker, the clerk attending the McCormack store locked up the store to go next door to the saloon for his supper. Chacon, and two of his henchmen, Pilar Franco and Leonardo Morales, crawled through a transom in the rear of the store intending to steal money, guns, food and anything else they could find of value. Becker finished his meal, returned to the store and walked into the robbery still in progress. Instead of opening the safe as ordered, Becker lunged at the thieves knocking the gun from one bandit and grabbing the knife of another. With his hand sliced badly from the knife, he was again ordered to open the safe, and again he refused. Chacon stuck a knife into his side and left him for dead. The robbers got away with \$25 and two watches. Becker managed to struggle back to the saloon where Constable Alex Davis pulled the six inch knife from his side.

Constable Davis was also a Graham County deputy sheriff and the next day he led a posse on the bandits' trail. They found the bandits hiding in a lonely cabin atop a steep hill. Chacon saw the posse coming and he raced out the door followed by Franco and Morales. Franco and Morales managed to work their way to their horses and headed down the hill. Several posse members observed their escape, gave chase and killed both of them.

Chacon continued the battle with the remaining posse members. Pablo Salcido, one of the posse members, told Sheriff Davis that he was a friend of Chacon's and convinced him that he could talk Chacon into surrendering. He supposedly called out to Chacon and Chacon invited him to come ahead. As he advanced under a flag of truce, Chacon put one bullet through his head. The posse rained bullets down on the bandit in what was the bloodiest gunfight in Morenci history. After a period of silence, the posse advanced to find that Chaco was stunned by a bullet in his shoulder and another that had grazed and left a red streak across his chest. Two outlaws were dead, one posse member dead and Chacon injured.

Then someone made a big mistake. They put Chacon in the Solomonville (now Solomon) jail where he was to recuperate and then hang. The Arizona Republican called it the most insecure jail in the territory. He just casually walked away from the jail and hid in a ditch. One of the searchers fell into the ditch, landed on top of him and his freedom was very short lived.

On May 26, 1896, he appeared in the Solomonville Court to stand trial for the murder of Salcido and pled not guilty. He claimed that he would never kill his good friend Pablo. The jury didn't buy it and he was sentenced to hang on July 24. To be sure he would hang around to be hanged, he was sent to the Tucson jail to await the day.

He appealed his sentence. It was upheld. Do-gooders opposing the death penalty appealed to get it reduced to life. It was upheld. But all this delayed the date to June 18, 1897. I guess there was a requirement that the execution of the hanging take place in Graham County. But if they had hanged him in Tucson, or at least kept him in Tucson to the last minute, the southwest would have been saved a lot of trouble. As he was being transported back to Solomonville for the hanging he managed to saw off his shackles but did not manage to escape.

Nine days before the hanging it began to look as if El Peludo would finally get his neck stretched. But it was just not to be. A Mexican band played and sang loud, lively songs

TOMBSTONE BY TOMBSTONE

right outside the jail while the Hairy One burrowed, sawed and hammered his way through the thick adobe walls and the heavy board beams that surrounded his cell.

He was free for five years before the first Captain of the Arizona Rangers, Burt Mossman, illegally captured him in Mexico and brought him back to be hanged on November 21, 1902, on the same scaffold he was to hang five years earlier. To read about the courageous and daring arrest by Mossman, using two other outlaws as assistants, see the Burton Mossman story in this Volume.

My friend Nancy Brown reports the following: *Chacon made a thirty minute speech before the final call, smoked two cigarettes and drank a cup of coffee and then said, "It's time to hang". The body was cut down and delivered into the hands of Sisto Molino and Jesus Bustos. They hurriedly put him into a wagon and streaked to Molino's house where a stiff drink was poured down Chacon's throat and efforts were made to revive him. Sheriff Parks got word what they were doing and went to the house and ordered them to dig a hole and bury him--now! It was known he was buried in the yard of the Molino home. Years later, my father, mother and my two children and I went to the the old Molino home, where descendants were still living. My dad asked about the grave, but they insisted that Chacon was buried in the San Jose Cemetery. They may have moved the body at some time or he could still be there in the corner of the yard, with an empty spot and headstone in the San Jose Cemetery [San Jose, Graham County. Arizona]*



Source: *Outlaw Tales of Arizona*, by Jan Cleere; *The Arizona Rangers*, by Bill O'Neal; and *Arizona: A Cavalcade of History* by Marshall Trimble