

= Don Chafin =

Don Chafin (June 26 , 1887 ? August 9 , 1954) was the sheriff of Logan County , West Virginia and a commander in the Battle of Blair Mountain . As sheriff of Logan County , Chafin was a fierce opponent of unionization and received hundreds of thousands of dollars from coal mine operators in return for his violent suppression of the United Mine Workers union .

Chafin 's most notable anti @-@ union measures came during the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain , when he organized an effort to prevent armed miners from crossing through Logan County . He assembled a force of thousands of local townspeople , sheriff 's deputies , and national guardsmen . His forces successfully prevented the advance of the miners until federal troops intervened and forced the latter to disperse . As a result of his actions , Chafin became a hero of the mine operators and an enemy of the miners .

In 1924 , Chafin was arrested in connection with moonshining and sentenced to two years in prison . After his release , he became an important figure in the Democratic Party of West Virginia , and a lobbyist for the coal industry . In 1936 , he moved to Huntington , West Virginia , where he was a wealthy and well @-@ known figure until his death in 1954 .

= = Early life = =

Chafin was born on June 26 , 1887 , near the town of Kermit in present @-@ day Mingo County , West Virginia , the sixth of eleven children . His father , Francis Marion Chafin , was the sheriff of Logan County , and Chafin grew up in the town of Logan . (He was related to the Hatfield family of West Virginia ? his great aunt Levisa " Levicy " Chafin was the wife of Anderson Hatfield) . For two years he studied in the preparatory department of Marshall College ? without taking college courses ? but did not graduate . He also attended the Mountain State Business College , before teaching at the Dingress School in Mingo County .

In 1905 , Chafin married Mary Mounts , with whom he eventually had 10 children , eight of whom survived to adulthood . Three years later , in 1908 , Chafin was appointed the tax assessor of Logan County . In 1912 , Chafin was elected sheriff of Logan County for the first time , and in 1920 he was elected county clerk as well .

= = As sheriff = =

After becoming sheriff of Logan County , Chafin became known as " the boss " of Logan County or " the czar " , and its " best known citizen " . His authority extended so far into every aspect of public life that he reportedly controlled every judge and jury in the county . According to Howard B. Lee , the former Attorney General of West Virginia , Chafin was so powerful that " no schoolteacher was employed without his approval . "

Chafin 's vast power attracted the attention of mine operators , who paid him to keep the unions out of Logan County . The operators bribed Chafin with large payments , and paid many of the expenses of the sheriff 's department . While the exact payments to Chafin are unknown , a special commission ordered by Governor John Cornwell found that he received a payment of at least \$ 32 @, @ 700 per year in return for keeping the union out of Logan County . Other estimates of the bribes paid to Chafin range as high as \$ 61 @, @ 571 in 1921 , and other evidence suggests the possibility of even higher figures . The historian Robert Shogan reports that although Chafin 's annual salary was only \$ 3 @, @ 500 per year , his net worth by 1921 was in excess of \$ 350 @, @ 000 , suggesting that he received bribes of at least \$ 50 @, @ 000 annually .

The operators also directly paid the salary of at least forty of Chafin 's deputies , ensuring control over the department and favorable treatment . The bribes from the mine owners did indeed result in favors from Chafin ; Chafin stationed one of his deputies at every railway station in Logan County to " guard against union organizers " . Upon suspicion that someone entering the county was a union organizer , Chafin 's deputies would either force him to leave , arrest him , or beat him . In one case , Chafin mistook J. L. Heiser , the Chief Clerk of the West Virginia Department of Mines , for a union

organizer , then threatened him with a gun , hit him over the head with a blackjack , and forced him to leave the county . After the incident , realizing his mistake , Chafin paid Heiser \$ 1 @,@ 000 in compensation , but never faced any other consequences for his actions .

= = = Shooting = = =

Chafin 's anti @-@ union activities did successfully keep the United Mine Workers out of Logan County , but they also aroused the anger of UMW officials . Chafin also established a record of violent and unpleasant confrontations with union officials outside of Logan County . In one such incident in September 1919 , Chafin entered the office of the UMW in Charleston , West Virginia while he was " drunk armed and very belligerent . " William Petry , the vice @-@ president of the local union , asked Chafin to leave , but Chafin responded by brandishing a revolver . Petry then shot Chafin in the chest with a 22 @-@ caliber pistol . Petry was later cleared of criminal wrongdoing on the grounds that his action was self @-@ defense , but he expressed no remorse about the shooting and later remarked " That 's what happens when a man carries a toy pistol . That goddamned son of a bitch is liable to get well . I should have had my old ' forty @-@ four . ' " In a second shooting incident , a miner walked into Chafin 's sheriff office in Logan and , without a word , shot him in the chest . Chafin walked the two blocks to Logan General Hospital with a bullet lodged in his chest two inches from his heart . In a third incident , a disgruntled constituent walked into his office , with a gun drawn and reportedly said " Don Chafin , I 'm gonna ' shoot you dead . " Chafin reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a pistol of his own , and said , " Go ahead . We 'll hop into Hell together . " The man left without firing a shot .

= = Battle of Blair Mountain = =

Chafin 's conflict with the unions became most pronounced during the Battle of Blair Mountain in August and September 1921 . A strike , with its beginning in 1920 , had led to increasing violence throughout southern West Virginia , including the Battle of Matewan . The growing violence led to a declaration of martial law in 1921 , and a Congressional investigation into the circumstances in the area began , but it accomplished little . Then Sid Hatfield , the miners ' hero from the Battle of Matewan , was killed on August 1 by Baldwin @-@ Felts agents on the steps of the McDowell County Courthouse in Welch . After his murder and funeral , tensions erupted in southern West Virginia .

= = = The miners assemble = = =

Shortly after Hatfield 's death , a large group of miners began to assemble south of Charleston along Lens Creek , and prepared to march south to Mingo County , and free their fellow miners who had been imprisoned under the martial law decree for violent acts . The path of the march would take the miners directly across Logan County , causing fear for Chafin and his backers . Chafin declared " No armed mob will cross Logan County " , and prepared to stop the miners as they crossed Blair Mountain . Chafin 's pronouncements and preparations were regarded with contempt by the miners , who took up the cry , " We 'll hang Don Chafin to a sour apple tree . " One of the leaders of the miners , Ed Reynolds , later testified that a central aim of the march was " to kill Sheriff Don Chafin " .

Faced with the oncoming miner army , Chafin put into place plans he had been forming since early summer . Chafin had formed a small army of several hundred volunteers , composed of his deputies , mine guards , and members of the Logan County middle class , and had begun to train them in June . He established large weapons caches , including a stockpile of machine guns , and erected breastworks on the slopes of Blair Mountain . At around 2 a.m. on August 25 , Chafin turned on the fire siren in the town of Logan , calling together his army . By morning , 700 members of his volunteer army were assembled on the slopes of Blair Mountain . In addition to his land forces , Chafin established a small air force , composed of three biplanes that he rented from private owners

for use in reconnaissance .

After initial skirmishes on August 25 and August 26 between Chafin 's forces and the miners , UMW officials managed to defuse the tensions in the area , and convinced the miners to go home . Chafin recalled his troops and told them " You have been in defense of our rights . Logan County will never forget it . " Before the miners dispersed , however , the West Virginia State Police attempted to arrest a group of their leaders , and the attempt escalated into a shootout in which several miners died . Suddenly the rebellion reignited , and it became clear that a major battle was coming .

= = = The battle = = =

Chafin reorganized and enlarged his forces , and volunteers from around the state arrived to join his army . The Governor of West Virginia , Ephraim Morgan , also helped Chafin recruit men to join his forces , and sent an unofficial national guard unit to join him . Governor Morgan then named William Eubanks as a colonel of the National Guard , and ordered him to take command of the forces from Chafin . Chafin officially passed command to Eubanks , but " the army remained Chafin 's in popular perception . "

As it became clear that battle was imminent , and Chafin printed leaflets for his biplanes to drop on the miners , ordering them one last time to disperse . The effort produced no results , and both sides prepared for the conflict . Not long after the leaflets were dropped , the battle " erupted in hot warfare . " Chafin served as Eubanks 's second in command , and helped organize forces . The next day , September 1 , as the fighting intensified , Chafin left the front lines to establish a second line of defense around the town of Logan in case the miners broke through the first line . That same day , Chafin also equipped his biplanes with pipe bombs and tear gas , which they dropped on the miners , though they inflicted no serious casualties .

= = = Aftermath = = =

The next day , September 2 , the battle ended when federal troops under General Harry Hill Bandholtz arrived . Chafin and his army went home , and Chafin became " a hero in the eyes of the coal operators " for his role in stopping the march . While the operators regarded Chafin as a hero , the miners placed the blame for the bloodshed on Chafin .

Regardless of his role in the events , Chafin remained sheriff after the battle and began to round up and arrest a number of the leaders of the miners . While some of the top leaders arranged to be arrested in other jurisdictions to stay out of Chafin 's hand , others including Frank Keeney , a top UMW official , and Bill Blizzard , the so @-@ called general of the miners , surrendered to Chafin and were put in jail in Logan County . The trials eventually were transferred to other jurisdictions , and the prisoners passed out of Chafin 's hands without incident .

= = Politics and arrest = =

After the battle , Chafin went back to his normal work as sheriff of Logan County and " became more arrogant " , believing his position to be unassailable . He became involved in a number of illegal ventures , including a moonshining operation . He also became increasingly important within the West Virginia Democratic party , due to his celebrity status after the battle . He was frequently present in the state capitol , and attended the 1924 Democratic National Convention as a member of the West Virginia delegation .

A few months later , Chafin 's illegal activities led to his arrest . One of his deputies , Tennis Hatfield , was arrested for violation of the Volstead Act , and he implicated Chafin at his trial . Chafin was tried and convicted of violation of the Volstead Act at the federal courthouse in Huntington , West Virginia on October 14 , 1924 . He was given the maximum sentence of two years in prison , and ordered to pay a fine of \$ 10 @,@ 000 . The judge in the case also took special precautions to protect the witnesses against Chafin , due to his potentially violent nature . Chafin appealed the verdict , but it was upheld in April 1925 , and he was sent to the federal penitentiary in Atlanta . He

served part of his term before being paroled back to Logan County . While Chafin was in prison , he lost much of his influence in Logan County , and his political opponents took power . After his release from prison , Chafin moved to Charleston and retained some of his influence in the Democratic Party of West Virginia while lobbying for the coal industry .

= = Later life = =

In 1936 , Chafin moved to Huntington , where he purchased a number of properties including the Guaranty Bank , on top of which he built a penthouse as his home . He lived in semi @-@ retirement there for the rest of his life .

In his later days , Chafin trained coon dogs , and was known as " one of Huntington 's wealthiest men " and a " familiar figure " in the city . He suffered several heart attacks in his later life , and eventually died on August 9 , 1954 in a Huntington hospital after a surgical procedure .

= = Legacy = =

His house at Logan , known as the Chafin House , served as the Logan Public Library for many years and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994 .