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# Pound Ridge's Charlie Blaisdell, Former FBI Agent, Hunted Nazis And Helped Jail Mobsters

At 98, local lawyer Charles "Charlie" Blaisdell has plenty of stories to tell.

BY KEVIN F. MCMURRAY



**I**n 1980, then-Westchester County Executive Ed Michaelian conversed with old friend and colleague Charles "Charlie" Blaisdell, a 30-year resident of Pound Ridge and the town's legal counsel for nine years, about Blaisdell's intentions of retiring at the age of 65. "Ed told me I shouldn't retire," he recalls. "So I asked him what he had in mind."

At Michaelian's behest, Blaisdell was hired as a lawyer at the law firm Bleakley Platt & Schmidt in White Plains. Blaisdell figured he would stay at the job maybe three years or so before he retired. Thirty-three years later, he's *still* there and, at the age of 98, is as sharp and as dedicated as ever.

Today, Blaisdell works at the law firm two days a week, doing the reverse commute from Manhattan, where he now resides with his second wife, Beatrice. "I can honestly say there wasn't a day in 33 years that I didn't look forward to coming to work," Blaisdell says with a broad smile. "And I still bring in new clients."

"Charlie still has a firm handshake, a brisk stride, and a sharp legal mind," says William Harrington, senior managing partner of Bleakley Platt. "He is made from a crucible that doesn't exist anymore. When he is asked about how he is feeling his response is always the same: 'Never better!' And you believe him."

It's not as if Blaisdell hadn't already had a fulfilling life and career before joining Bleakley Platt. Raised in Brooklyn, where he was born in 1915, Blaisdell was accepted to Dartmouth College's class of 1937. There, he played football under the

legendary Coach Red Blaik, who would later become the head man for the all-time great teams that West Point produced from 1941-1958.

After graduating from Columbia Law School in 1940, he joined a small law firm on Madison Avenue, but the surprise attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor changed everything. In the months after the start of World War II, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover told some 1,000 field agents to recommend any friend who, like them, measured up to the job. A friend of Blaisdell's from Columbia Law asked if he would like to be recommended. Blaisdell, like a lot of young men of the day, thought being a G-Man was the stuff of dreams.

After 12 weeks at the training academy in Quantico, Virginia, Blaisdell entered the Bureau in March 1942. His first assignment as a field agent was to protect the strategic Soo Locks between Lake Michigan and Lake Superior from sabotage by the Axis Powers. The shipping locks were absolutely vital to the Allied Forces during the war, since 85 percent of all iron ore produced in the United States passed through there.

Blaisdell also had other important assignments for the war effort and homeland security. After the Soo Locks stint, he went on to Philadelphia, the only "open port" on the entire East Coast, where he focused primarily on preventing German sabotage.

Later, in New York City, he was part of the team that made the arrest of the infamous Nazi spy Erich Gimpel at a Times Square newsstand on New Year's Eve, 1943. "When confronted by the agents," Blaisdell remembers, "the first thing Gimpel said was, 'I guess I won't get to see New York on New Year's Eve.'"

Eventually, Blaisdell became good friends with a former FBI director, Louis Freeh, then a Katonah resident who led the Bureau under President Clinton. In 1983, Freeh was the head assistant attorney to Federal District Attorney Rudolph Giuliani. Freeh told him that the feds were taking no chances on a case popularly known as the Mafia-run "Pizza Connection."



Giuliani wanted legal representation for a key prosecution witness who had been whisked away into the Witness Protection Program—and he asked Blaisdell to consider taking on the ex-mobster as a client. Freeh warned him that it was a dangerous assignment, because he would surface in the press reports as the legal counsel for the client. Nonplussed, Blaisdell told Freeh, "Danger is not something I look for, but I don't run away from it, either." For 18 months, Blaisdell, who took leave from private practice, represented the client in what became the longest-running criminal court case in American history. (Thankfully, there were no incidents of violence.) The feds succeeded in convicting 22 out of 23 defendants.

"Charlie is a brilliant lawyer, but he also is an iconic lawyer, not only in Westchester, but in the country as well," Freeh says. "He's the classic, sage, counsel guy with gravitas...who younger lawyers in big firms go to because of his sound law knowledge and advice."

Not too surprisingly, there were many other interesting legal adventures Blaisdell was involved with in his 67-year-long law career. Throughout the 1950s and '60s, he worked for or with the likes of Howard Hughes in Las Vegas and Sam Giancana, the Chicago mob boss. In 1963, he was hired by the Richard Reynolds family (of Reynolds Aluminum fame)

to handle the negotiations with abductors of a nephew by the Moro guerrillas in the Philippines. It involved the "cloak-and-dagger" dealings with Philippines President Diosdado Macapagal.

In 1985, Blaisdell's wife of 30 years, Alla, died, leaving Blaisdell with his two "wonderful children," Charles Jr. and Nancy Chase. Following the loss of his wife, he spent the next 10 years unattached—until he met Beatrice. She was the widow of a gentleman whose estate Blaisdell was representing. When he had built up the courage to phone her the first words out of her mouth were, "What took you so long?"

Reflecting back on his long life and career, Blaisdell, who is currently one of the oldest retired FBI agents, says: "The price of success is simply hard work. That's what I learned in my life and, whether it's an important legal judgment or a judgment in life, sleep on it for 24 hours—then don't make haste. Make it and move on."