

THE NATIONAL LAW JOURNAL 2014

LITIGATION

TRAILBLAZERS & PIONEERS

FRED H. BARTLIT JR.

BARTLIT BECK HERMAN PALENCHAR & SCOTT LLP

PIONEER SPIRIT After his first few months at Kirkland & Ellis in 1960, Fred Bartlit said to his father, "Pa, everyone here is really smart. They all went to Harvard, Yale and Princeton. What should I do?" Bartlit Sr. advised his son to find something no one else wanted to do and get good at it. "Everyone talked about being a trial lawyer, but no one really wanted to do it. So I started trying every case I could."

TRAILS BLAZED Bartlit has tried a number of high profile cases since, including representing Allison Gas Turbine against allegations that it was culpable in an explosion that killed 160 people. "That case took place in Aberdeen, Scotland, and the judge gave me the right of audience in a British court. It may be the only time for an American lawyer." Perhaps Bartlit's biggest impact, however, is Bartlit Beck's business model. "Most law firms have few partners and many associates, charge by the hour and see how many lawyers they can put on a case and how many hours they can bill." He believes the model is upside down. "If matters are staffed mainly by partners, quality should be better, and if so, we don't want to get paid by the hour. Michael Jordan never got paid by the hour, he got paid for the results he got." Bartlit Beck is the only firm that defends major cases for Fortune 20 firms that never bills hourly.

FUTURE EXPLORATIONS Bartlit expects to see smaller leaner law firms, as "there's no reason to get bigger because there are no economies of scale. There may be room for a few megafirms that serve all the geographic areas, but generally the quality of your lawyers is not scalable."

