

1997

Patrolman Matthew Byers
Patrolman Mark Proud

Madison Township Police Department

Heroes don't always win, but they try. Sometimes the odds are against you. Sometimes fate is against you. Sometimes you don't have the right equipment. Sometimes no matter how hard you try, no matter how much you hurt, no matter how close you come to dying yourself, the outcome isn't what you hoped. It doesn't change the act of heroism.

On July 9, 1997, Patrolmen Matt Byers and Mark Proud of the Madison Township Police Department earned the right to be called heroes.

On that evening, Madison Township Safety Forces were sent to a house fire on North Ridge Road. Byers was the first to arrive, followed shortly by Proud. Byers entered the house, without the benefit of any specialized gear. He was greeted by darkness and smoke, intense heat, and the sounds of flames roaring through the second floor. His only safety net, a flashlight barely lighted his way as he fought up the stairs. He used every ounce of his energy, fighting past falling timbers, in an effort to reach the bedroom. His lungs ached and his throat burned. Byers tried to make a dash for the bedroom, but the smoke became too intense, and he felt close to passing out.

Right behind Byers was Proud, who had followed him into the house. Proud pulled Byers back into the staircase by his belt. The officers realized the futility of going further and aborted their efforts. Proud escaped to the porch roof, while Byers kicked open the front door to escape. Both were later treated for smoke inhalation. Tragically, a 43 year old female and her 5 year old son died in the fire. Neither officer ever heard a sound from the victims.

Proud would later comment that "there must be more I could've done", however he and Byers did much more than most people would, or could. At the Blue Coats Banquet on January 21, 1998, Proud stated "It's a tremendous honor to be recognized for our efforts, but I don't want it to overshadow the horrible tragedy that took place." "And it's hard to be happy when you remember the incident that placed us here" added Byers.

Mark Proud left Madison Twp. PD and relocated to the Columbus area, where he served with Hilliard P.D. Matthew Byers is currently the Chief of Police in Madison Twp.