

# Fire Marshal Paul Ritchie Dies in Crash

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Paul C. Ritchie, Jr., an Assistant State Fire Marshal for the State of West Virginia, died this past Thursday in a motorcycle accident in Proctorville, Ohio. With his passing, the law enforcement and firefighting communities in West Virginia suffered the loss of one of its most talented public servants.

Paul was not only known for his extensive expertise in fire investigation but also for his skills as a bomb technician. He lectured across the state and across the nation on explosives recognition and investigations. He served as part of the protection detail for our political leaders, including the President of the United States.

His involvement in high profile cases over the past ten years is well documented. However, even more than his technical knowledge, he was known for his sense of dedication to his family and his community.

If you looked only at his facial expressions, you would have missed his intelligence, his sense of humor, and his quiet, humble nature. He worked with passion; he worked long hours and touched everyone who ever met him.

Paul was undeniably one of the bravest men I ever knew. He was a man who voluntarily and proudly chose a life of duty, honor and danger over any other career path he could have taken. He knew full well that in his line of work the slightest mistake could have grave consequences. He graciously accepted the challenge.

He was a member of the West Virginia Chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators, the International Association of Bomb Technicians and Investigators, and the Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge #122.

He has served on the adjunct faculties of West Virginia University, Marshall University and the Regional Education Service Agency. He is a former Emergency Medical Technician, Paramedic and firefighter. He also served a Chief of the Barboursville Volunteer Fire Department for ten years. He is among only a select few of Certified Bomb Technicians in the state.

He dedicated countless hours of his personal time to the Forensic Science Program at Marshall University, where he not only lectured, but also mentored numerous students over the past years. The Paul C. Ritchie Award for

Excellence is presented to a Forensic Science student each year in recognition of his contribution to that program.

His extensive study in the field of terrorism and potential threats against the United States had him warning us of Usama bin Laden and al-Qaida long before they became household names in this country. He began training first responders to be prepared for the inevitable attacks years in advance of the September 11, 2001 tragedies.

Paul was preceded in death by his parents, Paul Cyrus Ritchie, Sr., and Marguerite Pack Ritchie. Survivors include his wife, Patricia Ann Ashworth Ritchie; a daughter, Michelle Ann Haddox of Huntington; and grandchildren Theodore Prescott Haddox, IV, and Jacob Paul Ritchie Haddox.

His list of friends is literally endless. We may never know exactly why Paul Ritchie died when he did, but we know that he would not want any of us to be distracted by his passing. The thousands who turned out to mourn his death were part of a well deserved distraction.

We will continue to celebrate his life and tell stories about his antics for many years to come. He gave honor to our values. He was an outstanding fire marshal, a dedicated public servant, and a loving husband and father.

And, he was our friend. His absence will be felt for a long, long time.