James Keith Kallstrom, a beloved husband, father and grandfather, and a decorated US Marine and FBI Agent, died July 3 at the age of 78 at his home in Fairfield, Connecticut.

His was a life defined by service: to his family, his country, and to the children of Marines and law enforcement personnel whose parents paid the ultimate price in defending us. Known as Jim or Jimmy to his many friends, he was the first person you’d call if you were in trouble. He was also the last person you’d want to see if you were a terrorist or mafioso intent on causing it.

He was—to his fellow Americans but above all to his family—a hero.

In 1996, an anxious nation looked to Jim for answers in the wake of the tragic crash of TWA Flight 800 off the coast of Long Island. As the Assistant Director in charge of the FBI’s flagship New York office, Jim led a sprawling 16-month investigation that the Washington Post described as “one of the most expansive inquiries in airline history.” During those uncertain months, Jim was a constant presence beaming into living rooms across America, demonstrating the direct, plainspoken leadership style that won him the admiration and loyalty of so many of his fellow agents.

Jim’s leadership and love of country was honed in the United States Marine Corps, where he served from 1966-1969, seeing extensive combat with the 1st battalion, 3rd Marines in Vietnam in 1967. When he returned home, a chance meeting set him on the path to becoming an FBI special agent, beginning with a 1971 posting in the Baltimore field office. Across a distinguished 27-year career, Jim pioneered some of the bureau’s most innovative surveillance practices. His technical wizardry was so renowned that some colleagues took to calling him “Q” after the fictional special agent who made clever spy gadgets for James Bond. A 1996 New York Times story said Jim’s crimefighting techniques played “a critical role in the arrests of every major organized crime leader and terrorist in New York in the last 20 years, including those involved with the World Trade Center bombing in 1993.”

Jim retired from the FBI in 1997, and worked in the private sector before once again answering the call to serve. After 9/11, then New York Governor George Pataki appointed him to lead a new state public security office responsible for preventing future terrorist attacks.

Jim was never much of a golfer and in retirement he threw himself into the Marine Corps and Law Enforcement Foundation (MCLEF) that he helped found in 1995 with several of his Marine brothers, to provide educational and other humanitarian benefits to children who had lost a parent in service. He served as MCLEF’s Chairman of the Board until his passing, helping to raise over $84 million for over 4,400 recipients since the charity’s inception.

James Keith Kallstrom was born in Worcester, MA on May 6, 1943 to Todd, a big band trumpeter and Edna, a registered nurse. He has two siblings: Roger Kallstrom of South Chatham, MA and Lynn Cangelosi of Worcester, MA. Jim spent summers in his youth on the beaches of Cape Cod and eventually made his way back in retirement, finding a dream home on beautiful Onset Bay. If you walked on to the back deck, you would find a flagpole with The Stars and Stripes on top and two Marine Corps flags right below it. And underneath those flags, you would find Jim at his happiest:

At home, surrounded by his devoted wife of 50 years Sue, his daughters Kristel and Erika, his grandchildren, and the family and friends who loved him so much.

In remembrance of Jim’s life, the family asks that any charitable donations be made to support either the Marine Corps Law Enforcement Foundation at www.mc-lef.org or the work of Dr. Francine Foss at Yale Cancer Center at www.yale.edu/supportMedicineOther or via check to Yale Cancer Center, PO Box 7611, New Haven, CT 06519-0611. Please indicate that you would like your memorial donation to support Dr. Francine Foss.