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Arthur Haggerty, 74, Master Dog Trainer, Dies

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By [MARGALIT FOX](#)

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Arthur J. Haggerty, perhaps the most famous dog trainer in the United States, who was familiar to legions of dog owners as Captain Haggerty and to legions of dogs as He Who Must Be Obeyed, died on July 3 in West Palm Beach, Fla. He was 74 and lived in Jupiter, Fla.

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Jeff Haymes, circa 1996

Captain Haggerty did not believe in mollycoddling his charges.

The cause was cancer, said his daughter, Babette Haggerty-Brennan.

A former Army captain, Mr. Haggerty was widely credited with establishing dog training as a respectable profession in this country. For many years, he presided over Captain Haggerty's School for Dogs, which he founded in Manhattan 45 years ago and later moved to Los Angeles.

Mr. Haggerty trained dogs for more than 450 television commercials and more than 150 feature films, including "Eyes of Laura Mars," "Shamus" and "The Pawnbroker." He trained dogs for Broadway ("Annie") and for daytime dramas ("All My Children" and "The Guiding Light"). He trained dogs for the United States

military during the Vietnam War, for police departments around the country and for many Hollywood celebrities.

In all, Mr. Haggerty trained more than 100,000 dogs, his daughter said. He also taught a generation of dog trainers, among them the well-known trainer and author Matthew Margolis.

Mr. Haggerty, who used his military title as a marketing masterstroke, cut an imposing figure on television and the lecture circuit. In his prime, he was 6 feet 3 inches tall and weighed 350 pounds. He had a cue-ball shaved head and a meaty Bronx accent and often sported a cape. Minus the cape, he looked a great deal like Mr. Clean, and for some years he portrayed that character at Procter & Gamble trade shows.

A frequent guest on the “Late Show With [David Letterman](#)” — he appeared on it more than two dozen times — Mr. Haggerty also played bit parts in several movies, including “Married to the Mob” and “Honeymoon in Vegas.”

In the early 1960’s, when Mr. Haggerty established his school, dog-training academies were almost unknown in the United States. His curriculum, too, went far beyond the usual sitting and fetching. He trained show dogs and sled dogs; stage dogs and screen dogs; bird dogs and rabbit dogs; herding dogs and tracking dogs; patrol dogs and messenger dogs; drug-sniffing, bomb-sniffing and mine-sniffing dogs; guide dogs and avalanche dogs; sentry dogs and attack dogs, among others.

His clients included the [New York Stock Exchange](#), where his dogs used to sniff for drugs before the opening bell; the Pinkerton detective agency; the Panamanian defense forces; and a roster of celebrities including Hugh Hefner, Flip Wilson, Liza Minnelli, Brooke Shields, [Leona Helmsley](#) and [Henry A. Kissinger](#).

Mr. Haggerty’s big blunt exterior belied a soft center, associates said. But he had little patience for the New Age dog-training methods of recent years. These methods, in which trainers “sit down with the owners, hypothesize, talk philosophy and whisper in the dog’s ear kissy face nice-nice and click a clicker,” were almost always ineffectual, he told Dog World magazine in 2003.

“Results matter, period,” Mr. Haggerty explained in the same interview. “Take the dog who barks and barks relentlessly. The desperate renter will have to get rid of the dog if the problem isn’t fixed. Here’s what I do. I wait with the owner in the hallway. Sure enough, the dog starts barking and I explode into the house and scare the living” daylight out of the dog. (Mr. Haggerty did not use the word “daylights.”) He added:

“And after one session with me — if the owner follows up — the dog lives. Period. End of story.”

Arthur Joseph Haggerty was born in Manhattan on Dec. 3, 1931, and grew up in the Bronx. He liked to say that he cut his teeth on a feed pan: his father and grandfather raised and showed Irish setters and Boston terriers. He began training his own dogs as a child.

Mr. Haggerty spent nine years in the Army, which he joined in 1951. First came two tours in Korea, where he earned a Bronze Star and three Purple Hearts. Afterward, he trained military dogs, eventually becoming the commanding officer of the K-9 unit at Fort Benning, Ga.

In 1961, Mr. Haggerty founded his academy, originally known as the Tri-State School for Dogs. For many years it was on East 76th Street in Manhattan; in 1991, Mr. Haggerty moved the school to Los Angeles. He retired to Florida in 2004.

Mr. Haggerty’s marriage, to Betty-Ann LaMott, ended in divorce. Besides his daughter, who runs a dog-training business in Jupiter, he is survived by a brother, Gerard, of the Bronx; and two grandchildren.

In the interview with Dog World in 2003, Mr. Haggerty was asked what he wanted his eulogy to say. He came up with this: “He was an annoying and grating individual. But he loved dogs. He saved lives. He got the job done. End of story.”

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