

## **Pilar: Hemingway's Favorite Lady**

### **By Kelly Durbin**

Ernest Hemingway had four wives, but perhaps no "lady" was as precious to him as his customized 38-foot boat, *Pilar*. To Hemingway, the vessel was much more than just a way across the water. She was the constant companion upon whom he relied to carry him into and out of his grandest nautical adventures.

In the quarter century that he piloted *Pilar* throughout the Caribbean, his frequent voyages on the boat took his passion for fishing to new heights. He had grown up fly fishing the lakes and streams of Michigan, but at her helm he became one of the most accomplished offshore anglers of the twentieth century. And in the process, *Pilar* became the most recognized sportfishing boat in the world.

In 1934, after an African safari, Hemingway was in New York City to meet with a publisher. After the meeting, he headed to Coney Island to visit the Wheeler Shipyard, a ship maker well known for its handcrafted wooden boats. Hemingway used the advance he had just received as a down payment on a 38-foot yacht from their Playmate line.

Not content with the standard version, the writer dictated several modifications. By this time, he had become fascinated with saltwater fishing and was looking forward to taking long fishing trips. He had boated his first marlin a year earlier, and he was hooked. He therefore added a live well, four 75-gallon fuel tanks, a 2,500-lb. icebox, outriggers, and two motors—a 75hp Chrysler Crown for traveling and a 40hp Lycoming for trolling—for a cruising range of 500 miles.

For a final cost of about \$7,500, Hemingway had secured the boat from which he would catch fish, set records, and write the chapter of his own life at sea. Once complete, she was delivered to Key West and christened the *Pilar*.

Why *Pilar*? Stories vary. He may have recycled the name of the heroine in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. He may have remembered fondly the Spanish bullfighting shrine called Our Lady of the Pillar. Most likely, he simply chose the nickname of this then-wife, Pauline. It may have been a combination of all three.

He now had a boat. She now had a name. And it was time to see what she could do.

Hemingway's fascination with the sea started during his days as a reporter in the Midwest. In 1928, he fell in love with saltwater fishing. Soon after, he moved to Key West. Hemingway was a magnetic personality, and it didn't take long before he had attracted a bevy of buddies to fish with. The group became known around town as "The Mob", a nickname no doubt influenced by the author's propensity for keeping a loaded Tommy gun onboard as a shark deterrent.

Together, they trolled the waters around the Dry Tortugas, Bimini, Marquesas, and Cuba in search of giant tuna and marlin. At the time, the accepted method was to wait for a hooked tuna to tire before hauling it in. Always on the lookout for easy prey, sharks would savage the fish before it could be hauled out of the water. In 1935, so the

story goes, Hemingway fought a gigantic tuna for hours, only to have it "apple-cored" toward the end.

Hemingway was not the kind of man to take such a slight lying down. The next time it happened, he was ready. Just like real mobsters back in Chicago, Hemingway pulled out his Tommy gun and started spraying lead. He laid into the circling sharks with gusto, spilling even more blood...and of course attracting more sharks.

After once shooting himself in the leg and having many a trophy fish mutilated, Hemingway came up with a better way. He learned that if he applied constant pressure, he could manhandle the tuna in close while it was still energetic. "The secret," he said, "is for the angler never to rest. Any time he rests the fish is resting."

This approach kept the sharks at bay and resulted in a giant, undamaged tuna sitting on deck...and no bullet holes in his legs or his boat, either. History remembers him as one of the first fishermen to bring in a giant Bluefin tuna in an undamaged state.

Hemingway applied this tactic to catching marlin, as well, pushing himself and those who fished with him to land fish as quickly as possible. In a time where catch-and-release fishing was rare, he let plenty go. He learned that not only was an exhausted fish easy prey for sharks, but it was also less likely to survive if released.

His time on *Pilar* nurtured a fascination with the fairness of the struggle between fisherman and fish. He once stated, "Of course, it could never be considered an equal contest unless the angler had a hook in his mouth, as well." Such a statement shows that for all his outward bravado, he had gained the inner perspective realized by so many sportsmen who, during the chase, develop a deep respect for their quarry's resilience and will to survive.

In *Hemingway on Fishing*, his son Jack says in the foreword: "His feelings about hunting big game and bird shooting were similar to those he had for fishing; they called for a thorough knowledge of the prey as well as sympathy and even love for it. *The Old Man and the Sea*, his most widely read work, had all these elements as well as a triumph of the human spirit under tragic circumstances."

His respect for marlin, in particular, led to a series of fishing trips with Charles Cadwalader, Director of the Academy of Natural Science of Philadelphia. The scientist tapped Hemingway's firsthand knowledge of all kinds of marlin—white, blue, black, and striped—and used Hemingway's meticulous logs regarding his many catches to help reclassify North Atlantic marlin variants.

On his boat with friends, staring down the horizon, Hemingway was in his element. Adventure, camaraderie, humid air laced with a salty tang, cocktails—he drank them all in from his perch on *Pilar*.

Hemingway had a will to win and was a natural competitor, and he soon started entering the region's biggest fishing tournaments. In 1935—only seven years after he had first been introduced to big-game fishing—he won every fishing tournament held in the Key West-Havana-Bimini triangle. In 1938, he established a world record by catching seven marlin in one day. He won one tournament three years running, and it was subsequently named in his honor.

But it wasn't all fun and games on *Pilar*.

With the 1940s came WWII, and Hemingway became obsessed with defending his beloved waters from German submarines. With help from the U.S. Navy, he outfitted *Pilar* with the latest radio equipment, grenades, and short-fuse bombs. He used his own boat as bait, but alas, the U-boat was one fish he never caught.

In the 1950s, he traveled around the world. But whenever he could, he returned to the Caribbean and to his beloved boat. He married a new wife and bought a new home in Cuba, but one thing didn't change: *Pilar*. He kept her docked nearby, within easy reach in case the weather was good for fishing.

The iconic author and angler has been gone for over 50 years, but his stories and his legacy live on. And so does *Pilar*. She was the muse that constantly inspired him, the lady whom he never divorced or replaced. Now, she's the star attraction at the Museo Ernest Hemingway located at the site of Hemingway's former residence at Finca Vigia, just outside of Havana, Cuba.

Note to JD and Dan: there are a couple images online that show the full-scale replica version of the boat at our Islamorada store. There may be high-res files somewhere that could be used in the article.

<http://www.basspro.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/CFPage?storeId=10151&catalogId=10051&langId=-1&appId=94&storeId=21>

[Possible photo callout if you can get a pic of the boat we have down in Florida:]

If you can't make it down to Havana to see the original, visit the Bass Pro Shops store in Islamorada, Florida, where a full-scale replica of *Pilar* is on display.