

Frank Mundus, 82, Dies; Inspired 'Jaws'

By DENNIS HEVESI
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Frank Mundus, the hulking Long Island shark fisherman who was widely considered the inspiration for Captain Quint, the steely-eyed, grimly obsessed shark hunter in "Jaws," died on Wednesday in Honolulu. He was 82 and lived on a small lemon-tree farm in Naalehu, on the southern tip of the Big Island of Hawaii, 2,000 feet above shark level.

The cause was a heart attack, his wife, Jeanette, said.

Mr. Mundus and his wife moved from Montauk, on the South Fork of Long Island, to Hawaii in 1991, but often returned to Long Island in summer, when tourists and city-slicker enthusiasts sought to spice vacations with a shark hunt, priced at \$1,800 for a party of five.

On just such a venture in August 2007, the tail of a nine-foot thresher shark splashing off the stern of his 42-foot boat, the Cricket II, slapped Mr. Mundus and sent him reeling. He struck right back, planting his gaff — a giant fish hook on a pole — in the shark's back and hauling it aboard.

Mr. Mundus had run charter boats from the docks of Montauk since 1951, taking fishermen out for easy-to-catch mackerel and fighting bluefish. But one night in the 1950s, according to one of his accounts, sharks outnumbered the blues and in the ensuing struggle a shark was snared. The next day Mr. Mundus posted a sign by his boat: "Monster Fishing."

Mr. Mundus inevitably became known as Monster Man, and he looked the part, with his safari hat, a diamond-studded gold earring, a jewel-handled dagger with a shark-tooth blade, and the big toe of one foot painted green and the other red, for port and starboard.

His most fateful encounter with a shark came one day in 1964, when Mr. Mundus already had two sharks hanging on the side of his boat and a third on the hook. Then he spotted a huge one alongside.

"I harpooned him and he took off for the horizon," he told The Daily News in 1977. "Before I got him, I harpooned him five times. A white shark. A killer. He was 20 ½ feet long and 15 feet in girth and weighed at least 4,500 pounds. The biggest ever caught."

The legend grew, and in the next few years, he repeatedly took Peter Benchley, who wrote the best seller "Jaws," out to sea. (Frank Mundus in 1980. He once caught a shark that he estimated at more than 4,500 pounds.)



Frank Mundus in 1980. He once caught a shark that he estimated at more than 4,500 pounds. CreditWalter Krajicek

Mr. Mundus told a New York Times reporter that Mr. Benchley loved the way he harpooned huge sharks with lines attached to barrels to track them while they ran to exhaustion.

In 1975, "Jaws" was turned into Steven Spielberg's blockbuster movie, which for years left millions of beachgoers toe-deep in the sand. Robert Shaw played Quint, who exits by sliding feet first into the belly of a monster great white.

Mr. Benchley, who died in 2006, denied that Mr. Mundus had been the inspiration for Quint, whom he described as a composite character.

Clearly irked, Mr. Mundus said: "If he just would have thanked me, my business would have increased. Everything he wrote was true, except I didn't get eaten by the big shark. I dragged him in."

In 1986, Mr. Mundus dragged in a 17-foot-long, 13 -feet in girth 3,427-pound great white — not by harpoon, but by rod and reel, quite a feat for a man with a withered left arm.

Frank Louis Mundus was born in Long Branch, N.J., on Oct. 21, 1925, a son of Anthony and Christine Brug Mundus. He broke his arm as child and a bone-marrow infection set in, leaving that arm shorter than the other. By then, the family had moved to Brooklyn, where Mr. Mundus's father found work as a steamfitter and his mother ran a boarding house. Doctors told Mr. Mundus's parents that they should take him to the beach to swim to build strength in his arm.

"He fell in love with the ocean," his wife said.

Besides his wife, the former Jeanette Hughes, whom he married in 1988, Mr. Mundus is survived by his sister, Christine Zenchak; three daughters from a first marriage, Barbara Crowley, Theresa Greene and Patricia Mundus; five grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren. His first marriage, to Janet Probasco, ended in divorce.

Mr. Mundus dropped out of high school and got a job as a freight handler. Soon after, however, the pull of the sea had him working on charter boats for \$3 a day. By 1951, he had his own boat, the Cricket, and was sailing out of Montauk Harbor. He named his boats after Jiminy Cricket because people told him that with his sloping forehead and Roman nose, his profile looked like the character in the film "Pinocchio." Although Mr. Mundus caught hundreds of sharks during his career, he became something of a conservationist in later years. He promoted the use of circle hooks, which catch in the jaw, not the gut, increasing a shark's chances of survival if it escapes or is released. He also helped start a shark-tagging program and voiced support for catch-and-release fishing.

As it turns out, Mr. Mundus did not think much of "Jaws."

"It was the funniest and the stupidest movie I've ever seen, because too many stupid things happened in it," his Web site says. "For instance, no shark can pull a boat backwards at a fast speed with a light line and stern cleats that are only held in there by two bolts."

1. **Please work in two groups and create the two sharks caught off Montauk NY using students to illustrate the size and lengths of the sharks. Your Shark should be able to swim around the classroom.**

