

# For a veteran from Grand Island, history was made at home and on a D-Day birthday



“We landed on Omaha Beach,” Harold Long recalls. “... I turned 23 on D-Day.” Mark Mulville/Buffalo News  
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## **Harold ‘Bud’ Long, 95**

Hometown: City of Tonawanda

Residence: Nunda, Livingston County; formerly Grand Island

Branch: Army Air Forces

Rank: Staff sergeant

War zone: Europe

Years of service: 1942-45

Most prominent honors: European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with four battle stars, World War II Victory Medal

Specialty: B-26 bomber crew chief, aircraft mechanic

By Lou Michel News Staff Reporter

Harold “Bud” Long comes from an old Buffalo family whose members helped settle Grand Island.

“I grew up on my dad’s farm. We had about 500 acres we farmed,” the 95-year-old veteran recalls. “We had two tractors and two teams of horses. My grandfather had been one of seven brothers who lived on Long Road in a log cabin. They were one of the first settlers on Grand Island.”

And he also made history in 1944, storming the beaches in the Allied invasion at Normandy on D-Day.

“We landed on Omaha Beach on June 6, the same day as my birthday. I turned 23 on D-Day,” Long says.

He also believes that he caught a lucky break by being part of the landing on the beach that came to be known as “Bloody Omaha” for the high number of casualties.

“The commanders almost decided to pull out of Omaha,” he says. “We weren’t getting anywhere. We couldn’t get off the beach.”

You might ask why Long considers himself fortunate to have landed on that strip of blood-soaked shoreline.

“Back in the States, I was trained as a flying crew chief on a B-26 Marauder bomber, but when I arrived in England, they wanted a bunch of us to become aircraft mechanics,” he says. “The idea was to build emergency airstrips between the infantry and artillery 4 or 5 miles in from the beaches at Normandy. Those B-26 bombers soon became known as ‘flying coffins.’ So many of them were shot and crashed. It’s hard to estimate, but a lot of crew members lost their lives.”

He adds that his streak of luck began long before the invasion, starting on the Queen Mary, which brought him to Europe.

“There were 15,000 troops onboard, and we made it across the Atlantic without an escort or any trouble,” he says. “The story was that the Queen Mary made two trips a month bringing 15,000 troops to Scotland and England. I remember one time we went down to the where the ship’s indoor swimming pool was. It was all white. We were told it was filled with sugar that they were bringing over.”

And while Long was grateful to be on solid ground repairing the bombers, he says it was a long way from home and his wife.

But as an aircraft mechanic, he says there wasn’t much time for him to think about home. “We were hammered all the time by the German big guns – 88-millimeter field guns. They were mounted on tanks, railroad cars, everywhere, and they were mobile and very accurate,” Long says. “This one time we were in a foxhole and got out of it because the rounds were coming in too close. We moved back a ways. A couple hours later, we returned, and there were no trees or hedgerows left, and all the foxholes were completely wiped out. I felt damn lucky we made the decision to move back.”

Lifesaving decisions such as that were often made on the fly without consulting officers, he explains.

“It was up to you or the small group of six or seven that were with you. Our officers were around sometimes, but they were busy, too, getting the hell out of the way themselves,” Long says. “The German POWs would tell us, ‘You guys are hard to fight. We never know where you are going to be.’ They would have to wait for orders before they could do anything – move one way or another.

“The GIs were not like that at all. We made some good decisions and some that weren’t, but most of the time it turned out to be the right decision.”

Such freedom, he believes, saved his life – “I’m sure it did.”

Long made it all the way to Germany without a scratch.

“We went to Nuremberg and Frankfurt and Munich. Frankfurt was just about wiped out. They used bulldozers on our tanks to clear out the debris in the streets so that our equipment could get through,” he says. “We got within 40 miles of Berlin, and everything halted. We had to wait for the Russians to take Berlin.”

In late August 1945, with World War II won, he returned to the United States and was discharged at Fort Dix, N.J.

Back in Buffalo, he resumed his civilian job at Curtiss-Wright Aircraft in Cheektowaga for about a year. When the plant closed, he started working at his uncle’s appliance store, Long Electric, in the City of Tonawanda, where the Long family also had an extensive history that includes the Long homestead, a museum on the banks of the Erie Canal.

Eventually, he was appointed Grand Island’s superintendent of water and wastewater. Long and his wife, the former Lucille Killian, a member of another early Grand Island family, raised two daughters, Kathleen and Christine, and a son, Jeffery.

“My daughter Kathy had been born on Aug. 16, 1944, the day I was in Paris and several days before it was officially liberated,” Long says.

In retirement, Long moved to Nunda, Livingston County, to a home about 4 miles outside Letchworth State Park.

A widower of eight years, Long says he keeps busy “maintaining 2 acres of lawn, the house and playing a lot of golf.” But the march of time has thinned the ranks of World War II’s veterans.

“There are very few of us left. My outfit was the 83rd Airdrome Squadron, and as far as I know, I’m the only one left out of more than 360,” he says. “I run into a few World War II vets now and then. We talk about what went on. You laugh about it now, but at the time, it was pretty damn serious and scary.”