David Roulston - Leading British Aircraftman, 146 Typhoon Wing

In the run up to D-Day, my wing was based along the south coast of England. While waiting to go over, we read a newspaper account of the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, informing parliament he planned to go to Normandy with the troops. But he was forced to abandon the idea in the face of stiff opposition.

Our turn came and we arrived in Normandy two weeks after the invasion, alongside the Canadian First Army. Around 50 of us landed in a field on the edge of a lovely village called Sainte-Croix-sur-Mer, right on the coast. By the time we arrived, the ground had been cleared, along with all the German soldiers.

As soon as we landed we started laying a temporary landing strip - metal sheets hooked together and laid out on the grass to alleviate the bumps and hollows. One morning, as we worked, word went around: “Winnie’s here!” We downed our tools and headed for the beach. None of us knew he was coming!

The sight of him coming up the beach and being recognised immediately, was of course wondrous.
Our Prime Minister, as large as life, entirely by himself, no guards, no officers, a lone figure walking up the beach. When he reached us, somebody shouted for a box so we all could see him. He accepted the invitation and climbed on, and gave us a 2 or 3 minute speech off the cuff. We were so pleased to see him; he was smiling, completely natural, and as delighted to meet us as we were him.

I am 92 years old, and my memory has faded, so exactly what he said I cannot remember. But I know it was a pleasing encounter, a visit we were proud to have. We admired him - old Winnie as usual wouldn't be put off by anyone, he made the visit despite opposition! His visit showed us that we had his personal support, and it was a real boost.

This picture of him addressing us is my most treasured photograph.