

Franklin and Winston – A Portrait of Friendship by Jon Meacham.
Granta Publications 2003.

It is almost beyond question that the key relationship during the Second World War was that between the President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Winston Churchill; their determination to defeat the forces of fascism and the strong leadership that they gave to their countries were crucial in saving the civilised world from Nazi tyranny.

Yet the actual story of the professional and personal relationship between the two men is far from straightforward, and all students of the period owe Jon Meacham a huge debt for his careful, meticulously researched, and engagingly presented description of how a shaky start yielded an almost rock solid friendship that won the day.

After their first meeting in the early part of the 20th century FDR was most unimpressed with Churchill, and the perception of the British politician in Washington, both before he became the war leader and immediately after his assumption of the Premiership, was far from positive. Yet over time, with charm, astuteness and great persistence Churchill wooed and won Roosevelt, not only to the cause of the fight against Hitler but also to a personal friendship and deep mutual respect.

Meacham sheds light on a whole range of incidents, especially the summit meetings between the two men, and later between them and Stalin, explaining the pressures they were under at crucial moments and the ways in which FDR occasionally allowed his own realpolitik to overwhelm his friendship for and loyalty to Churchill. He also demonstrates the deep love that Churchill came to feel for Roosevelt, and the way in which he was often prepared to suborn his own position out of respect for his colleague.

This is a wonderful book, reminding the reader of the power and tenacity of two extraordinary men, and reinforcing the debt that all of us who enjoy the benefits of the free world owe to them.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh