

The Storm of War – A New History of the Second World War
by Andrew Roberts.
Allen Lane 2009.

Andrew Roberts reputation as a writer and historian was high before The Storm of War was published, but with it he deserves to claim a place among the very best of the last 50 years and more.

The Storm of War, drawing on the latest available archival material, with a large section of maps and excellent photographs, traces the history of the Second World War, after a brief but succinct prelude reviewing political events between 1934 and 1939, through three stages looking at different aspects of sometimes overlapping periods: Onslaught, covering September 1939 - May 1942, Climacteric, covering 1939 - May 1945, and Retribution, covering March 1943 - September 1945.

Roberts writes with the fluency, cogency and authority that might be expected of him, and they are enhanced further by the occasional interpolations of opinion which reveal his true feelings about the events or individuals whom he describes.

For me the value of this book lies not just in the seamless way that Roberts takes the reader from Hitler's Wolfschanze to Whitehall or the Kremlin, or from war torn Stalingrad to the North African desert, or marries information about the European and Far Eastern theatres of conflict, or writes powerfully about the individuals on both the Allied and Axis sides, particularly those in the military, but in the realization that on a number of occasions the Allied cause came close to disaster. Roberts makes clear how many aspects of the war there were where a slight tilt in the favour of the Axis powers could have changed everything, and that still has the capacity to shock and disturb all these decades on.

I cannot think of a better, more thought-provoking or beautifully written single volume history of the Second World War than The Storm of War, it is essential reading for anyone interested in the period and an eloquent testimony to the bravery and sacrifice of a generation in freedom's darkest hour.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh