Major General Mungo Melvin has managed to produce a very readable history of the Crimea and Sevastopol. This book serves to burnish his credentials as a military historian, following as it does his other work on the life and campaigns of Hitlerâ€™s great commander Manstein.Ã‚Â The book is very timely given recent and on-going events in the region. At just over 600 pages, Melvin takes the reader from the earliest references to settlement in the region of Crimea up to 2014; a *tour de force*.

The history of Sevastopol is closely tied to the history of Russia. In a year which marks the centenary of the Russian revolution, this book has the added merit of filling in the â€˜back storyâ€™ of Russia for those unfamiliar with the way in which it pursued its own version of the â€˜manifest destinyâ€™ of expansion adopted by the US in the 19th century.

British readers will be familiar with Sevastopol from the Crimean War of 1854-55. The strategic significance of the port was the reason for the siege undertaken by the British and their French allies. The city was besieged again in 1941-42 by the Nazis, who largely destroyed it. The transfer of the Crimea to Ukraine by Khrushchev in 1954 was little noticed by western commentators in the middle of the Cold War. Melvinâ€™s book reminds us that when politicians swap territory over the heads of the population, they store up trouble for future generations.

The author takes considerable pains to spell out the history of this strategic territory. It repays reading, as the tendency among commentators and policy makers is to listen to those who scream loudest. The history of this region, like most of Europe, did not begin in 1945 and cultural and folk memories are often shaped by a sense of grievance. This book helps the reader to make up their own mind about recent events. The author does well to maintain a neutral stance throughout.

As befits a book written by a military historian, Sevastopolâ€™s Wars is well equipped with reference material. An extensive bibliography is complemented by a useful selection of maps (the author is a Royal Engineer, which has been the provider of military maps), and the book is well foot noted. The reader will be richly rewarded by this book, both in the reading and for future reference.

Reviewed by Nick Watts, Deputy Director, U K Defence Forum

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