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rible; a burning police station, dead policemen everywhere, women and children who had survived were wailing and crying. Fortunately, the discipline of the force was such that any thoughts of Min Yuen-type reprisals against the local Chinese were quickly overcome.

(Min Yuen or People's Movement was an arm of the CPM whose members organised the food and logistical supply chain.)

"This was as gallant a defence as any in history; the garrison had many opportunities to surrender, and the fact that their families were under fire as well added to their plight."

The Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) was a full-scale war that for purely commercial reasons was described as an emergency.

To describe it as war would have meant leaving their assets without insurance cover as no insurance company would be willing to cover war risks.

I am intrigued by the versatility of the English language: it can be relied upon to oblige with the right word to fit any linguistically awkward situation. The war, however described, was a policeman's war against forces determined to impose their foreign ideology on the people of Malaya. How magnificently the police acquitted themselves to deny the communists their dream of turning this country into a satellite state of China.

In 1948, when the Emergency started, the Malayan Police Force comprised 8,000 officers and men. None had been trained for jungle warfare.

In spite of the great handicaps under which they were required to operate, they remained steadfast in keeping the better-trained jungle fighters of the CPM at bay and giving them a good run for their money. In the first few months, it was touch and go until Commonwealth reinforcements began to arrive.

The police took heavy casualties throughout the Emergency because they were at the sharp end. Without the brilliantly-led Special Branch with its expertise in intelligence gathering and analysis, the war would have been lost or victory considerably delayed.

The police, in the more than 200 years of recorded history, have kept law and order in good and bad times. It has not always been easy for them but they have shown what esprit de corps and discipline can achieve.

So, next time you feel like criticising them for their shortcomings, remember their last stand at Bukit Kepong, the Emergency and the peace and security we enjoy in this blessed land. Last but not least, remember we deserve the police we get.

The writer is a director of International Institute of Public Ethics and board member of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission.