Dalforce, or the Singapore Overseas Chinese Anti-Japanese Volunteer Army (星华义勇军 - Xinghua Yi Yong Jun) as it was more popularly known among the Chinese community of Singapore, was a hastily formed volunteer army created just before the fall of Singapore in February 1942. It was made up of between 1000-3000 Chinese volunteers from all walks of life and political persuasions, from Kuomintang to communist. During the dramatic climax of the Malayan Campaign of World War II (8 December 1941 to 15 February 1942) several Dalforce companies, armed with limited weapons and ammunition, were sent to defend the different fronts of Singapore Island after only a short stint of training. The soldiers of Dalforce, alongside the Australian, Indian and British armies, fought the Japanese invasion during the Battle for Singapore in February 1942. The Overseas Chinese community in Singapore saw Dalforce as a medium through which they could join in the struggle, together with their comrades in China, against an aggressive and belligerent Japan. This small army became a symbol of something their comrades in China failed to truly achieve - the ability to unite in one force against a common enemy. The exploits of this little army became an Overseas Chinese legend in Singapore.

Through the examination of several core Chinese language texts and a few other English language texts produced in the immediate post war years, it will be argued that there is a common story of Dalforce described by these texts that constitutes a legend. This legend highlights the bravery and military contributions of the volunteers of Dalforce. By analysing the linguistic style of the texts, it will be argued that the style fits into a genre of emotive Chinese war literature that was common in China and Malaya during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Having established that there is a legend of Dalforce, this legend is analysed using a variety of other primary and secondary sources, such as Australian battalion records and oral history testimonies. It will be argued that some aspects of the legend have been exaggerated. The historical reality behind the legend will be presented, showing that although the volunteers were brave, their achievements have been blow out of proportion to what they accomplished in historical fact. Finally, there will be an examination of the changing memory of Dalforce from the post war years till the present. Through an examination of a varied range of sources from newspapers, British Military Administration archival documents to popular culture, it will be shown that the memory of Dalforce remained strong in the post war years but began to fade away into dormancy in the 1950s. The memory was once again revived and remoulded to suit the changing needs of the Singaporean nation in the 1990s with the revival of the Singapore government’s interest in the war years to support present day policies, namely that the suffering during the war shows that Singaporeans must defend themselves and that Dalforce is an example of Singaporeans defending themselves.