

“Invasion”

At dawn our big Sea knight helicopter lifted off from Dong Ha a few miles below the DMZ and headed north on Operation Hastings. The date: July 16, 1966. We flew north for about 15 minutes and then our flight of several choppers took a hard turn to the southwest. Below was an unbroken green jungle laced with rivers and streams. Also below were 10,000 troops of the NVA 324B division that had invaded South Vietnam through the DMZ a month earlier. In a few minutes our chopper landed in a field near the 700-foot high pyramid-shaped Rock pile as it soon became known. Over the next 18 days 5,000 Marines battled the NVA along jungle trails, streams and on ridge tops supported by Marine artillery, dragon gunships and B52 bombers. By early August 324B had seen enough and retreated back across the Ben Hai River into North Vietnam looking to replace some 2,000 troops killed in combat below the DMZ. 126 Marines were killed and 400 wounded. A month later the enemy would be back - so would the Marines.

—Donald, South Glens Falls