

FINAL EDITION

Pentagram moves to digital age,
ends decades as printed newspaper

By Mike Howard
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Today marks the end of an era. Pentagram readers will no longer smell fresh ink or feel crisp newsprint. This printed edition is the last one. Beginning next week, the Pentagram will become an online-only publication.

“This is a very sad day for us at the joint base,” wrote Col. Kimberly Peeples, Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall commander, in an email. “The Pentagram is iconic. The editors and writers made it the reputable, beloved and valued information source it’s been for years! ... It will be hard to replace and will be sorely missed.”

The Pentagram was printed by a private company at no cost to the Army. The printer’s revenue comes solely from ad sales. While low ad sales have been threatening the overall newspaper business for some time, COVID-19 made it especially hard-hitting for the Pentagram.

The command left the door open for bringing back the print version after COVID-19 is over and the economy recovers, but for now the change is immediate.

New Beginnings

Although saving the Pentagram became a top priority for Peeples, she understands how technology and the current pandemic is affecting print news.

“It has been one of my priorities to keep the print edition of the newspaper going even in these tough days for print publications,” Peeples said via email. “I know there is an important segment of our community that doesn’t rely on digital media for its news. However, with COVID-19, it just is not feasible to print a full newspaper any longer.”

Still, Peeples wants to reassure readers that her staff will find ways to continue communication with the joint base’s key audiences, especially the retiree community.

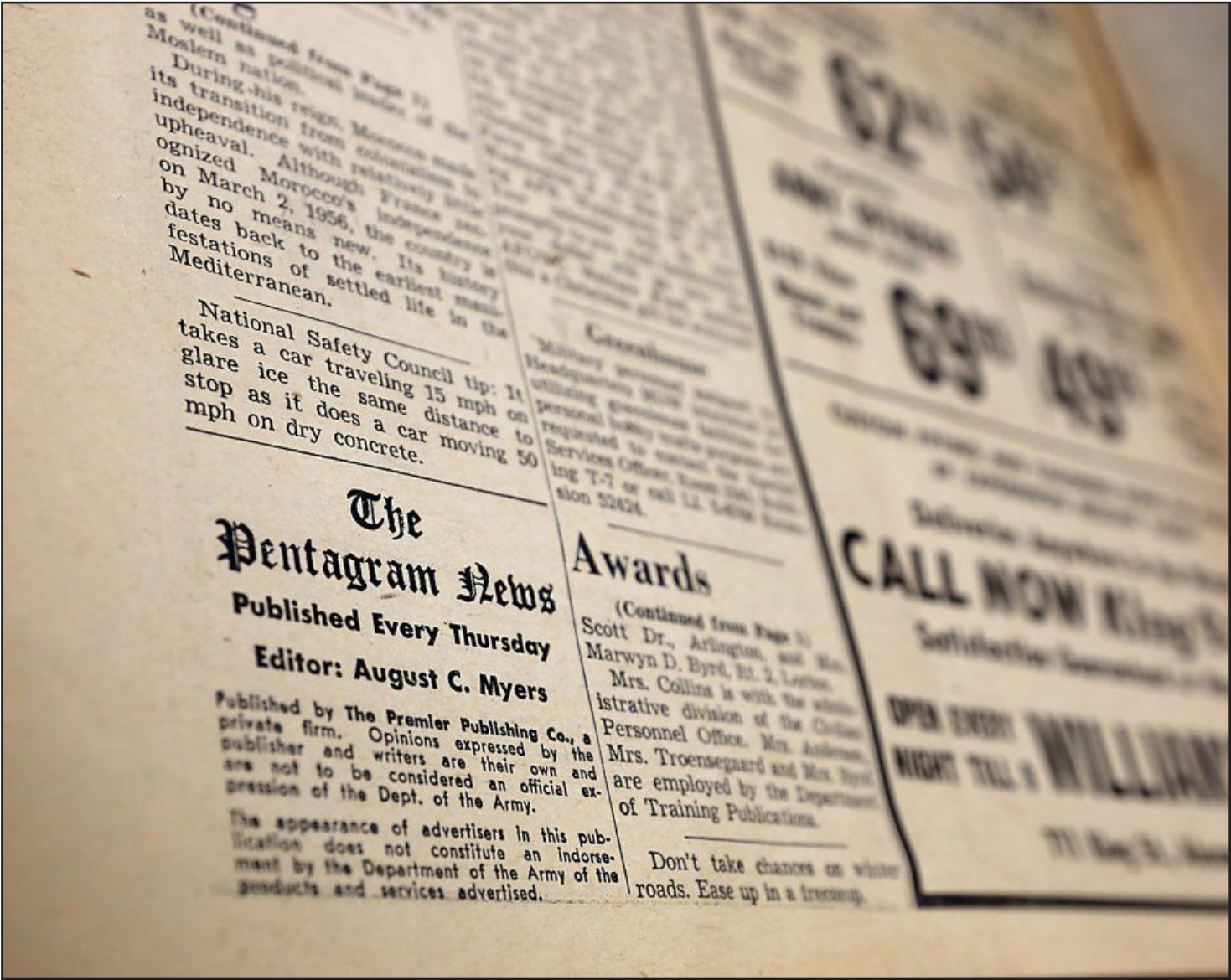
“Welcome to the digital age,” emailed Glenn Wait, JBM-HH chief of staff. “You know no matter what may change, the Army goes rolling along. During COVID-19, we have learned that social media tools can keep us connected. We have had tremendous success with our virtual town halls and video efforts. Now an online newspaper will be another dimension of our communications.”

Julia Simpkins, JBM-HH command information officer, will lead that effort.

“Our aim is to maintain continuity in command information sharing,” said Simpkins in a text. “I don’t view this hiccup as a bad thing, but as evolution. The online world is taking precedence over the physical world of storytelling. News stories are no different. The methods of putting out information evolves, but the need for that information is a constant.”

Pentagram History

I was not able to access a collection



The Pentagram News, one of several newspapers that were precursors to today’s Pentagram newspaper, was billed as an “independent newspaper” and was published weekly from 1949 to 1971 before being replaced by the MDW Post. Today’s Pentagram is derived from two Greek words: “Pente,” meaning “five,” and “Gramma,” meaning something written, drawn or otherwise noted.

of bound copies of the newspaper in the Fort Myer library because it is closed due to the pandemic, so I reached out to some other sources for a look at the history of the Pentagram.

A Google search turned up an article Jim Goodwin wrote about the newspaper in 2015. Goodwin was the paper’s editor from 2014 to 2016.

The Pentagram traces its roots to 1949 when the Military District of Washington published the Fort Myer Post, according to Goodwin, who was able to access the archive for his article. This newspaper “served those who worked at or lived on any installation within the Military District of Washington, according to a look at Pentagram archives,” Goodwin wrote.

The Pentagram News started sometime before 1957, Goodwin continued. This paper appears to be the actual predecessor to our current newspaper as it was printed by a civilian contractor at no cost to the government and became a weekly published every Thursday.

Kim Holien, former historian at JBM-HH, wrote in an email that his personal knowledge of the Pentagram goes back to the 1950s. His father retired at Fort Myer in November 1957. The younger Holien wrote that he found a copy of the paper from that month and year, confirming that the paper is at least that old.

That nearly 63-year-old edition contained a story about his father’s retirement on Summerall Field, wrote Holien. “At that time the Retirement

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Stand consisted of a cement block about four inches high and about ten-foot-by-ten-foot or thereabouts,” he wrote.

Goodwin explained that the Fort Myer Post changed its name to the MDW Post and eventually went away. In 1983, the word “news” was dropped from the title of The Pentagram News.

Early Days

My search for historical information found former staffers from various generations who offered personal memories of their experiences with the publication to help me give a proper tribute to the paper.

A friend connected me with Steve Abbott who was an Army specialist five working on both the MDW Post as the editor and The Pentagram News as the senior military reporter from 1973 to 1977.

Abbott remembers the monthly MDW Post as the Military District’s official publication published at the

same time the organization was also printing The Pentagram News.

“These two papers could not have been more different,” Abbott wrote in an email. “The Pentagram News — ‘The’ was part of the official name — was a serious publication written with the knowledge that it was read by the highest level military and civilian leaders in the Pentagon. ... The Post was definitely targeted to our younger enlisted soldiers. It was great fun to edit and write for the Post.

“As reporters we were able to truly be journalists and present both sides of a topic (for both papers) ... we generally were able to cover current issues, in a balanced fashion, even if they were somewhat controversial. I remember having meetings with (my public affairs boss) after an edition had come out and he relayed some spirited conversation he had with a senior military type about how we had covered a particular story.”

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