

## Where My Items Come From

I am both a “collector” and a small “dealer.” I have attended reunions, air shows and militaria shows in the US and Europe since around 1955. If I meet a recipient whose autograph I do not have, I ask him for one inscribed to me personally. If he has a book he is selling, I will purchase a dozen or so of those books, have him inscribe one to me personally and sign the others - which I offer for sale. I never sell an autograph that the recipient gave me for no charge.

Some recipients sell their autographs and I have no problem with that. I will purchase between 25 and 50 of those. A few, like the late Gregory “Pappy” Boyington, go to various shows and have a table where they sell their autographs and other signed items. Others would not consider selling their autograph.

When I go to these shows, I carry my laptop and a small high resolution photo printer that prints postcard size prints. On my laptop I have photos of all of the living Medal of Honor recipients and all of the Aces from WWII through Vietnam. If I run into someone I do not have a photo of, I will take one of him and use it. I will then print about 25 copies of a postcard size portrait and pay him or her to autograph them for me. I will always have one inscribed to me personally, and when I return home, I will create an album page display of the subject and send him two copies of it along with two affixed unsigned photos that he can sign.

There are, however, dealers who attempt to get something for nothing. Recently one dealer contacted several MOH recipients and asked them for about 50 autographs each to give to a class of history students. It was not long before those autographs appeared on eBay. Also, after every annual reunion scores of signed autographs appear on eBay.

I will often purchase those autographs from those dealers. I will then use those to create my album pages and look for new homes for those album pages. I also purchase collections.

I am comfortably retired and sell these album pages not for profit, but rather to subsidize my retirement project. I create displays as gifts for all of the MOH recipients, the next of kin of deceased recipients, military museums, and the VFW halls in the hometown of recipients.

My personal collection is comprised motly of items which are inscribed to me personally. and those are not for sale. I also have a few that are not inscribed to me personally that are of heroes I have met in the past or ones I am especially interested in. The other signed documents, cards, photos, etc. I create my album page displays and offer them for sale. That collection is comprised of several thousand signed items dating back to the 1600's and includes well over 2,500 German warsigned and post-warsigned photos of Knights Cross recipients - many of whom were killed in action.

Since this catalog is also my inventory for insurance purposes, I will ultimately be including personal items that are not for sale.

All of my autographs are authentic and subject to prior sale.

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### Other Signed Items

While my prime area of interest is military, collections I acquire often have autographs other than military related. When appropriate, I also create my album pages using these signed items. In my research I find that some of these have some kind of a tie to the military. Others I can find no military relationship, but if they are interesting enough to me, I will create an album page.

## More About My Collection

I have a very large collection of autographs of Medal of Honor recipients and other heroes that have some relation to the military. Some of these are signed photos, some are signed First Day Covers, most are 3" x 5" Medal of Honor signed cards, and some are documents. Most of my German autographs are on postcard size portraits.

Unlike World War I and World War II Germany, collecting autographs of heroes was not as prevalent in the United States. In Germany, collecting autographs was a powerful propaganda tool and the government provided heroes with professionally taken portraits in post card size for the heroes to autograph for collectors. In World War II, Hitler Youth groups even had adults whose sole purpose was to help the youngsters collect hero autographs.

As a result, most of the autographs of American heroes are not on photographs, but rather on the cards.

While there are a huge number of fake German hero autographs, there are relatively few fake American autographs - but they do exist. On eBay, I see fake autographs of Gregory "Pappy" Boyington on a regular basis. There are also a lot of fakes of Audie Murphy and a few others. I got stuck on a small lot of Chuck Yeager autographs. They were excellent copies, but they were fake. I would have never known had I not seen two of the seller's other items which I knew were obviously fakes. I had an expert look at my signatures, he said they were fake, and I had to make a couple of refunds.

Before purchasing a relatively high price item - like an Audie Murphy or Dick Bong signed piece - get an opinion from an expert. The seller's certificate of authenticity is as worthless as the paper it is written on unless the seller is a registered expertizer with the Manuscript Society or some other trade organization. An "opinion" is relatively inexpensive from these expertizers, but their certificates of authenticity are fairly expensive.

If you request a certificate of authenticity from a seller (like me) who is not an expertizer, what you are getting is the seller's guarantee. Most sellers are not experts in identifying fakes. If, within a specified period of time you have the item certified and it proves to be not authentic, the seller will make a full refund. That specified period of time is normally 30 days. That is enough time to get an expertizer's opinion. A "lifetime guarantee" is also worthless, unless it is from a well established corporation or auction house like Christies, Park Bernet, etc. A year or so down the road the seller may have disappeared from the autograph market and may be selling Barbie Dolls.

As noted, I am not qualified to certify signatures. However, on higher end items and items I question, I know a few experts I have look at them before I offer them for sale.

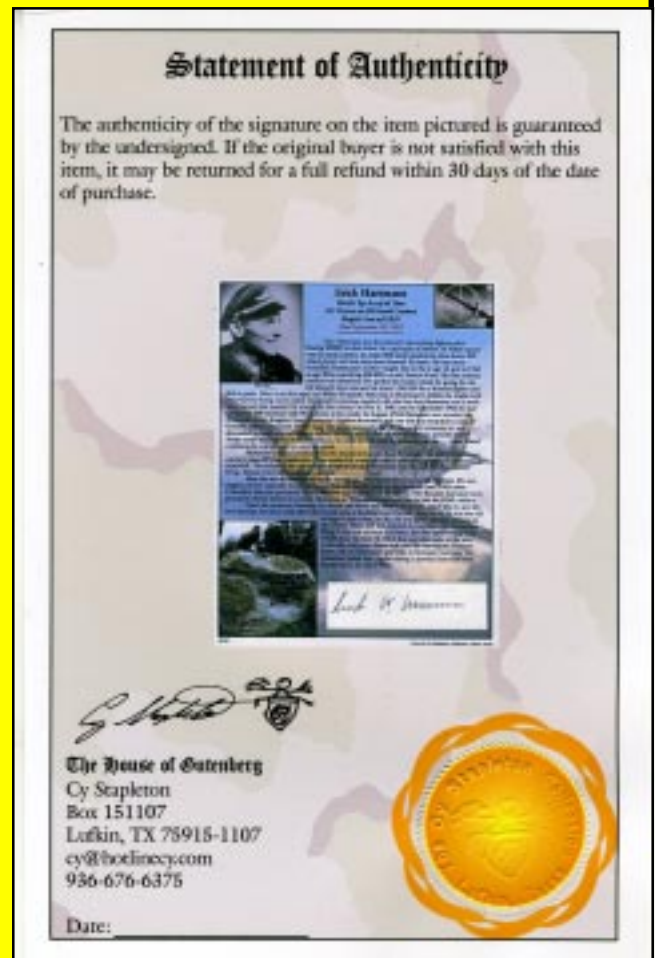
I give "added value" to each of my signed items. I create a framable album page that has some background information on the individual. If the signed item is small enough to fit on the page, I affix it to the page with clear photo corners or a special removable adhesive designed for that purpose. If it is a larger item, like a document, I will do a high resolution scan of the signature and put that signature on my album page, placing the signed document in the heavy poly holder with the album page.

My album pages come in the poly holder that is punched to fit a standard U.S. three ring binder. The page can be removed from the poly holder and be framed, or it can be placed in a binder.

My guarantee on all of my signed items is 30 days from receipt by the buyer. My guarantee on my other displays is 10 days from receipt by the buyer. USPS delivery confirmation's delivery date is the date the item is considered as having been delivered. Foreign shipments are shipped Global Priority Air and buyer should receive within 5 days of shipment.

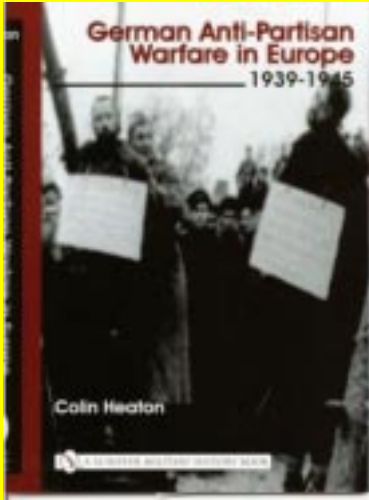
I am pleased to send my certificate if it is requested at the time of purchase. Under no circumstances can I issue my certificate unless the item is in my hands. The certificate is free for items priced at \$100 or more and \$5 each for items priced at less than \$100. A picture of my 5" x 7" certificate is on the right.

Cy Stapleton



# About Autographs

It is not uncommon for potential customers to question the authenticity of the signatures I use on my displays. I have no problem of any kind with that because there are so many forgeries offered - sometimes intentionally and sometimes by unknowledgeable sellers. While some of my signatures do come from wholesale dealers, the vast majority of the WWII and later were acquired by me personally, by a friend, or my German partner. Mine I pick up at reunions and conventions. I prefer small signed photos or "bookplates" for my displays.



The pictures above show how many of the bookplate signatures I use in my displays were intended to be used. My friend is a military author and historian who has been interviewing military heroes from around the world for over 25 years. In addition, he has been attending annual reunions of these heroes in both Europe and the United States. During these interviews and at these reunions he has these heroes sign sheets of "bookplates," which he cuts apart and affixes in "limited edition" copies of his books and interviews. He would also take 25-50 postcard size photos for them to sign. While he was personal friends with most of these aces he never got the chance to meet some of them. As an example, a planned meeting with Rudel at one of the Luftwaffe reunions was not possible because Rudel was ill. However, a friend of Rudel got a number of bookplates and signed photos of Rudel for him. As it turned out, Rudel died before the interview took place. On a couple of occasions, widows of aces made their husband's collections of signed photos available to him. Most of these subjects are now long deceased and their signatures are becoming quite scarce. Several years ago I acquired all of his bookplate signatures and signed photos with the exception of a few he held back to use in an upcoming book. The picture below, left is what an uncut sheet of the bookplates looks like. Most of these sheets have only the signatures of the individual. A few have a several different hero signatures. Still others are single sigs on a small piece of mat board. Those are ones the signers signed for limited edition prints and the mat was damaged.

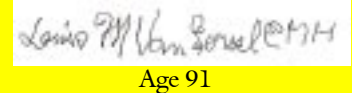
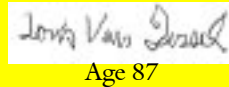
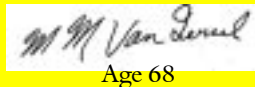
I use these signatures in my displays and in copies of the hero's books. I have numerous copies of books these heroes have written. Where possible, I will affix one of the author's bookplates or signed photos to the title page of the book.

In addition to the bookplates, I have also acquired numerous letters from aces to my friend. Often those letters have content I can use in my displays. In addition, those letters go far to quell any fears my customers may have as to the authenticity of my signatures. Also, in my personal collection, I have some 150 letters I have received from Medal of Honor, Victoria Cross and Knights Cross recipients. Finally, I have a partner in Germany. He acquires large and small collections of signed photos from estate sales in Germany. I create displays of these in both English and German. He offers the German language ones on his website and I offer the English ones on mine.

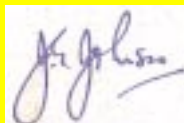
One very important thing to consider is that items that are a hand-signed typewritten notes are valued at 2-3 times that of the signature. Those with handwritten notes are valued at 4-10 times the value of a signature. The longer the handwritten document and the better the content, the higher the value.

C.D. "Cy" Stapleton

It is interesting to note the difference in signatures as the individual ages. Below is a dramatic example of Medal of Honor Recipient, Ludovicus M.M. VanIersel. The first dates from 1961. The 2nd dates from about 1980. The third dates from 1985, two years before his death. He was 91 when he signed the one on the right.



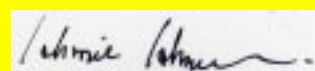
Johnnie Johnson was UK's top WWII ace. Note the dramatic difference in his signatures between 1943 and 1996.



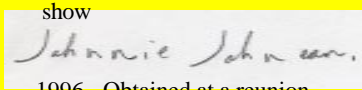
1943 - Official combat report



Late 1980's - Obtained at an air show



Mid 1970's- Signed photo obtained during a personal interview



1996 - Obtained at a reunion

