

Autograph Moment

November 2, 1957

Forgotten Glossy News Agency Photos Reveal Historical Signings that Only Few Remember



President Eisenhower signing for Glenn Allen outside the museum in West Point, New York. Original glossy news agency photos like this one have become collector items.

THIS IS THE FIRST IN A series of occasional “Autograph Moments” chronicling autograph-related news images that often appeared in dozens of newspapers across the country. Sometimes the events depicted are pivotal occurrences that ended wars, changed the boundaries of countries or otherwise altered the political landscape. These images not only hit headlines, but they have been reprinted in history books over the years. Other times the moment was so fleeting, so unnoticed except by the news photographer present, that not many remember it except those there. These images may have appeared between the obituaries and the classified ads and never been seen since. Let’s begin with one of these obscure images.

It was a passing moment that President Eisenhower likely forgot moments later and that no one present even took notice of—but which a young boy of perhaps 10 years old probably never forgot: The moment when the Commander in Chief paused outside the entrance to the West Point Museum to sign a scrap of paper held out by the smiling youngster. Clad in winter coat with fake


fur attached hood and wearing a cap that screams out “1950s!,” the boy smiles as the President focuses on clutching the scrap in his left hand and signing with his right.

Taken by Jim Mahan for International News Photos, a news photo agency later acquired by United Press International (UPI), the photograph itself measures 9x7. The caption below reads: “West Point, N.Y... President Eisenhower gives his autograph to Glenn [sic] Allen of Fort Lewis, Washington today after the President paid a visit to the Museum at the Point. The President will be at the dedication of a fountain and later will attend the football game between Army and Colgate...”

At least the real reason for the president’s visit becomes apparent—to root for Army! Eisenhower attended West Point, of course, enrolling in June 1911 and graduating in 1915.

And where is little Glenn Allen today? Assuming he was about 10 years old at the time of the photograph, he would be around 60 today. He was probably an Army brat, since he lived at or near a West Coast U.S. Army base and happened to be at an East Coast military base during the president’s

visit. Did he proudly display his Eisenhower signature to his school friends before stuffing it in a shoebox alongside baseball cards and other childhood flotsam? Did it survive to this day, squirreled away somewhere? Attempts to pin down Glenn Allen proved futile—perhaps an *Autograph* reader can steer me in his direction?

By the way, these original glossy news agency photographs are themselves collected today. The images aren’t necessarily scarce, for they were reproduced in newspapers that chose to run them. But the actual physical photographs normally got destroyed or filed away and forgotten. Depending on the image depicted and the condition, vintage news agency glossy photographs from the 1920s through the 1960s fetch anywhere from \$25 to \$50 for more recent, more common images to several hundred dollars for particularly choice, desirable early images. 

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