



# Flightline



Newsletter of the 780<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron of WWII

December 2018

## 780<sup>th</sup> film developer also pin-up artist

Happy Holidays, everyone! I hope this issue of the *Flightline* finds you well and looking forward to the new year, which is only a few weeks away. I can hardly believe it. My twins have their driving permits so this year has "speeded" by faster than usual for me.

For this issue I decided to share some photographs and the story about the man behind the camera. A couple years ago I was looking for some 780<sup>th</sup> im-

ages online when I came across some photographs by Louis J. Varro. I didn't know who he was but I loved his pictures of life around Pantanella. And his self-portrait, at right, wearing a cap with a jaunty "Lou" stitched onto it, intrigued me.



Judging by the cap alone he had to be an interesting guy, right? Let's find out:

According to a 2009 article about Varro that appeared in the *Southeastern Missourian* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Varro was born January 24, 1917 in Saskatchewan, Canada. His mother died when he was young. Varro took high school-level classes at a Bible college, then attended the Calgary Institute of Technology and Art, walking more than 100 miles to the

school due to not having a car or money.

In 1942 he joined the U.S. Army Air Corps. Following basic training in St. Petersburg, Florida, Varro was assigned to the 780<sup>th</sup> as a processor for films that came off the planes after a mission. In his spare time he also took photos around the base. But what he became famous for was his artwork, specifically, pin-up girls.

"I dabbled in photography, but my specialty then was calendars," Varro said in 2009 for the article about an exhibit of his art in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, his hometown in retirement.

Making use of his spare time in the 780<sup>th</sup> photography lab, "I would find a picture of a pretty girl, make a couple of them and give them away for the guys to put in their planes or their huts," he said.

"A lot of guys knew and liked me for that."

In a post on an art message board Armand Amicalement, a collector of World War II photography, explained that Varro also made small-print monthly pin-up calendars that were posted in many B-24s and B-17s during mis-



Left: Louis J. Varro outside the 780<sup>th</sup> photo lab at Pantanella, and right: in later life.

continued on page 2...

...continued from front page

sions in Italy. Below is one of his most famous calendar images.

After his war service ended, Varro was allowed to obtain U.S. citizenship. He worked odd jobs and moved to Los Angeles, where he took classes in painting. Varro worked as a draftsman in the aerospace industry, got married and had a family. When Varro's wife told him she was ready to get back to her roots, they explored the Midwest, ending up in Cape Girardeau in 1992.

There, Varro got involved with the Arts Council of Southeast Missouri and joined the local artists cooperative. In 2009 Varro's lifetime of work was showcased in a gallery exhibit featuring 42 of his works. Varro was 92.

"This is to honor him," explained Aartful Rose Gallery director Erin Schloss. "He's a spectacular artist and a humble person, and I wanted to remind him that his art is timeless."

Varro passed away November 6, 2014, in Cape Girardeau. He is survived by his son, Jonathan; daughter, Stephanie (Matthew) Clover; a brother and sister; and several grand-

children. He was preceded by his wife, Isabelle, and several siblings.



Top: Varro's cot at Pantanella, with his artwork and calendars displayed on the walls. Bottom: 780<sup>th</sup> Photo Section original members, taken January 1944 at McCook, Nebraska. From left, standing, Chet Kridler and Lou Varro. Kneeling: Robert Korthanke and Robert or William Babcock.



December 1944 pin-up calendar by Lou Varro.



The photo above appears on page 94 of '780' *Memoirs*. Some of the photos in *Memoirs* likely were taken by Varro. Unfortunately, I did not find any pin-ups. Do you remember Varro or his work? Please tell *Flightline* your memories.

**More photos of Lou Varro or taken by him appear on page 3.**

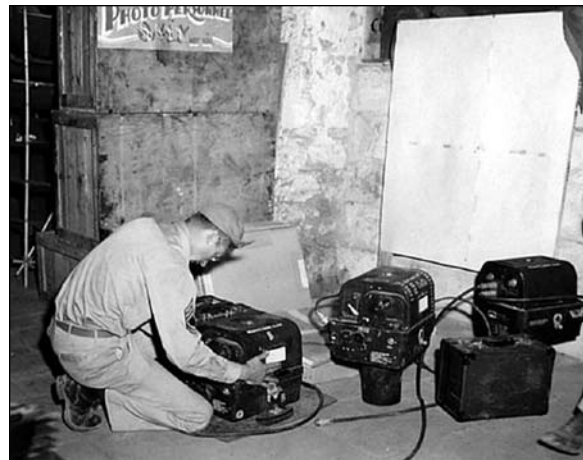
# TAPS



Howard Keil, 98, passed away May 8, 2018, in Perrysburg, Ohio. "Jack" was born October 6, 1919, in Woodville, Ohio. He married his wife, June, in 1941 and she preceded him in death in 2013. During World War II Keil was a top turret gunner and a flight mechanic. On July 26, 1944, his plane (Godfrey crew) was shot down over Austria. They were the second crew lost by the 780<sup>th</sup>. He bailed out and avoided capture for a few days before being detained at Stalag Luft IV as a prisoner of war. In January 1945, Keil and thousands of other troops were forced walk 500 miles across Poland, Czechoslovakia and Germany, known as The Black March. As a result, Keil didn't like crowds. Keil received the Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster. After the war Keil became a truck driver for the former Gallant Lumber and Coal Company in Toledo, and with him family always came first. He is survived by a son, Dennis (Mary); daughters, Dana and Candace; two grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. He also was preceded by a daughter, Cheryl.



*Varro working in photo lab, perhaps at McCook.*



*A photographer working with an aerial camera. Sign on wall says 'Photo Personnel Only.'*

*Chet Kridler, right, another 780<sup>th</sup> photographer, in a Jeep at Pantanella. Bumper says 15 - 465 BG on left and 782 BS on right.*





Kathy Le Comte  
Editor, *Flightline*  
1004 Williams Blvd.  
Springfield, IL 62704-2832

---

*Flightline*

---



Happy Holidays  
Happy New Year  
and  
Love All Year Long  
To My 780<sup>th</sup> Family

John & Kathy  
Lydia, Claudia & Audrey