



Twin brothers Joseph and George Klaput served on the James Hodges crew in the 711th Squadron as tail gunner and ball turret gunner. They are believed to be the only set of twins to serve together during the war.

Joseph Klaput kept the following record of his first four missions.

**This material was provided by Mr. Kalput and Mr. Dante Pettitt.
Photographs courtesy of Mr. Arthur Durante, Jr., and Mr. Jack Keller.**

"MY FIRST MISSION"

My name is Joseph H. Klaput and this is the story of my first mission over enemy territory. It originated on December 31, 1943. We were placed on the alert on November 30th. We were in our barracks, listening to crew 57 telling us about their experience they had on their first mission, when a sergeant came in and told us that crew 56, which George B. Klaput and I were assigned to, were placed on the alert. This meant that we were scheduled for a mission in the morning. It was also the last day of 1943. This would be first mission together. We were up till 11:30 before we crawled into bed, but it didn't do us any good. We were so excited that we couldn't sleep. We all laid there till 2 AM, That's when our engineer, Nevilles, woke us up and told us to get dressed. We all met at the orderly room at 2:30 AM and boarded the truck for the ride to the mess hall. After eating fresh eggs and cereal for breakfast, we again boarded the truck for the ride to the operation building.

Here we had our briefing at 4 AM. We were told that the mission was to Chateau Bernard, an airfield in Cognac, France. It was located in the southwestern part of France. We were told that the flak should be light and we may encounter a few fighters. Then Colonel Harris finished the briefing with a speech. We then went and picked up our flying gear which consisted of our electric flying suit, leather fleece lined suit and boots, helmet, oxygen mask, goggles, parachute and a may west, a life vest if you landed in water. We boarded the truck again for the ride to our plane named "Mr. Terrific" We put on our flying suits as our guns and ammunition hadn't arrived yet. In a few minutes, our Officers arrived at the plane. They are 1st Lt. Gordon MacRay as pilot in place of our own pilot who was in the hospital. Then 2nd Lt. Jesse T. Smith, Jr. as bombardier, nicknamed J. T., then 2nd Lt. Arthur A. Durante as navigator, nicknamed Ack Ack, and last was 2nd Lt. Harry P Pettit, Jr. as copilot, nicknamed Horse Power. The enlisted men on Crew 56 are T/Sgt. Donald M. Nevilles, our top turret-gunner nicknamed Chief, T/Sgt. Karl F. Joerger, Jr. our radio man, nicknamed Sparks. The waist gunners were S/Sgt. Wlliam C. Baker nicknamed Irish, and S/Sgt. Raymond H Rutledge, Jr., nicknamed Tex. You know were he came from. S/Sgt. George B. Klaput in the ball turret and I, S/Sgt. Joseph H Klaput was the tail gunner.

We finally received our guns and ammunition just twenty minutes before take off, which was at 7:31 AM. We really had to rush to install the guns. We were all in our positions

on take off until we reached our altitude for the planes to fall into formation. All except George, who was our ball turret gunner. I kept flashing in Morse code, the letter K with the Aldis lamp so that other planes could locate our ship and get into formation. In the meantime, George found that the cover plates were put on the opposite guns in the ball turret, seals were in backwards in the chin turret, belt feed slides were in wrong on the upper turret guns and the two waist guns were out. Also the radio room's gun couldn't get the adapter on as it had no nuts to hold it on and one nose gun was out. We found ammo for the tail guns strewn all over the floor.

We thought our equipment was sabotaged. George got the waist guns and one gun in the nose fixed. I got the tail guns operating but we had no ball turret, nor upper turret working. So Mac Ray had George go in the nose and to man the right gun. One of the officers gave George a helmet to put on, but when we hit the flak, George was sitting on the helmet so that he could protect his rear. We then flew out to the tip of England and out over the English Channel. After a while, we test fired our guns to see if they were working properly. We then went over enemy held peninsula that was in our line of flight. We hadn't encountered any enemy fighters or flak so far. We did see some of our own P-38's, which were a welcome sight. We proceeded over the Bay of Biscayne and after a little while, we went over the coast of France and flew inland to our initial approach, then our final approach. In a few moments we were over the target at 12:19 AM. That was only three minutes later than what our schedule called for. We were at an altitude of 15,500 feet. The flak was very accurate and thick. After a burst would explode near your plane, you would hear the same noise as if you were behind a large piece of sheet metal and some one was throwing handfuls of gravel against it with all their might but only louder.

The flak would come in a burst of four shells. When you saw the first one explode about a hundred and fifty yards away, then you saw the next burst explode near to the plane. That's when you are worried were the next two are going to explode. We were flying in the number four position called The Coffin Corner. All at once the number 5 plane flying on our left, looking the way we were flying but flying on my right as I am flying backwards, was hit. I saw the plane's number 1 engine was on fire as it fell out of formation and went into a small spin. I saw one man bail out and his chute opened. The pilot seemed to get control of the plane again but then it went into another spin, and that's when I saw another chute open. All at once a wing came off and then the tail and all of a sudden it blew up. The debris fell from under the flames and smoke. You can't believe the thoughts that goes through your mind in those few minutes.

The plane in number 6 position moved into the vacated # 5 position. We left the target and the flak when the plane that moved into # 5 positions just dropped out of the formation. I watched it till it flew into some clouds. I saw no chutes coming out of this plane. This left our plane the last in the group and that is why they call it "Coffin Corner". All at once the enemy planes started to attack our formation. Three of them came in at 6 o'clock low was firing at them till they peeled off. They were Me 109's. Then two more went flying by, then two more. On the fourth pass, four planes zoomed by. I fired at all of them but they went by so fast and right behind each other and at different altitudes that

you only had a few moments to fire your guns at them. A few minutes later, I had three planes coming in at six o'clock when one of them fired their canon and peeled off to the left. The second plane fired his canon and peeled off and away he went. Now the third Me. 109 came in at o'clock level and was moving over to the 6 o'clock position with me firing continuously. I then saw a huge flash in front of his plane and then black smoke started pouring out of the Me. 109. It followed the plane like a long big black streamer. The pilot discarded his canopy and flew up along side of our plane in the 3'oclock position, about 400 to 500 yards away, and leveled off.

The pilot then got out of his plane and onto the wing and he gave us a salute. He bailed off towards the tail of his plane, which then went into a dive and left a stream of smoke that followed the plane down. A little while later, four more planes started towards us with two planes behind them. I started to fire short burst at them when my guns stopped firing. I quickly charged my guns but to no avail. I lifted the armored plate that I place my chest against for protection.

I found that my ammunition boxes turned over and twisted the belts that caused the jamming of my guns. I straightened the boxes and the ammo belts. I was in time to shoot a few bursts at the two planes as they flew past the tail. We sweated the rest of the mission till we got back to our base in England. It seemed like we were sitting still. That's how we all felt, as we wanted to get back in a hurry.

As we flew across the Brest peninsula again. We encountered a few bursts of flak, but short of us. We finally arrived back at Jolly Old England and felt the first relief of the mission. Under the adverse conditions we started with, our crew performed admirably. No confusion, no getting excited over intercom and only talking when you had to plus having an excellent pilot. I had fired over 800 rounds of 50 caliber bullets. I saw at the least twenty planes that were Me 109's attacking towards the tail position. Some of them could have been the same plane but I couldn't tell. I learned a lot on this first mission. Especially about my ammunition, I was probably excited and I wasted a lot of ammo by firing to long of a burst instead of a short burst, then aim and a short burst. Etc. I also was firing at planes to far away.

After landing, we counted 57 holes in our plane from flak, canons and guns. It's funny how quick you start talking to the Dear Lord Above. Upon landing, we were taken to the interrogation building by jeeps and you were given a shot of scotch first to settle your nerves, so you can remember what you saw. We told them about our two wing planes going down and that I saw only two parachutes before it blew up and the other went down thru the clouds. The flak was accurate and enemy fighters jumped us. I told them about the Me 109 G that I shot down and all about it. They will question the crew to verify it. After we had our interrogation I was told that some of the crew verified seeing the plane come along side of us, The German pilot saluted. Bailed out and the plane went down in smoke. So it was verified and I would receive the Air medal. I was one of the first gunners of the 447th Bomb Group that was confirmed in shooting down an enemy aircraft. We checked in our gear and cleaned our guns. That is when I found out that I had burned one of my twin 50 caliber machine guns. All due to firing to long of a burst

instead for short bursts we were taught to do. Our crew was very happy when we landed, believe me.

This first mission that my twin George and I just made was ten hours and 10 minutes long. We had one gunner killed and three wounded from the planes that came back. Also Plane # 125, piloted by Lt. M.R. Moore and his crew was classified as "MISSING IN ACTION" OR MIA. This was the plane we reported seeing it go down and what happened to it. This was the second plane we lost from the 447 Bomb Group. Plane # 173 with Lt. J.V. Schrero and his crew was shot down the day before on the group's second mission to Ludwigshafen, Germany. Now George and I have just 24 more missions to go to complete our tour of duty and go home.

"MY SECOND MISSION"

I, Joseph Klaput and my twin brother George, went on our second mission together. The date was January 14, 1944 and there was a big difference in this mission compared to the last mission to Cognac, France. It was just fourteen days ago. For one thing we didn't have to get up four AM in the morning. We had our dinner and then our briefing about dinner time. We assembled at our plane and took off at 13:40 PM. This mission was scheduled in the afternoon. It also would be the first time we flew as a crew number 56. On the first mission John Hodges, pilot, was replaced by our squadron's commander, Gordon MacRay.

Our mission was a small-scale attack on a Noball target in the Bourne area of France. Our group assembled in formation over England and then headed over the English Channel. Nearing the French coast, we test fired our guns and had an oxygen check. Each position is asked and he answered OK. As we crossed the coast of France we became all eyes as we were on the lookout for German planes.

They were absent this day. We were at 12,000 feet when we made a bank to the left and that was when we jettisoned our Bombs so that they went in at an angle. I saw very little flak and George said the same thing from his ball turret position. We did see our fighter coverage flying in the distance and you would be surprised how their being there lifted up your spirit. You have so much confidence and respect for the pilots who are flying those planes. On our return flight to England we got a perfect view of the English Channel and the legendary White Cliffs of Dover. All I can say is it was awesome. After four hours and 40 minutes of flying time, we landed at Rattlesden Air Force Base at 17:15 PM. We were happy that it was uneventful and easy mission and our thoughts were the other 23 missions would all be like this one. Our crew consisted of pilot Hodges, co-pilot Pettit, Navigator Durante, bombardier Smith, engineer Nevilles, Radio Operator Joerger, waist gunners Rutledge and Baker, Ball Turret gunner George and I as tail gunner. Note! It was exactly thirteen months ago today that George and I enlisted in the Army Air Corps.

"MY THIRD MISSION"

I, and my twin brother George, went on our third mission together. Date was January 29, 1944 we were flying our third mission on the same plane. Each mission is the same procedure such as being on the alert the day before the mission, going to bed early but not saying how soon you'll be able to fall asleep because so much is going through your head.

Being awakened about 3:30 AM, going to mess hall for breakfast, then to the briefing room where you get the good or bad news about your mission. You then get your chute, Mae West and flying gear and get dressed, after you get on a truck and your taken out to your plane you check your guns and ammunition.

The officers show up at the plane and every one takes their positions for take-off. Pilot gets the plane in formation and as we get close to the enemy coast line, we test fire our guns have an oxygen check and we're on our way to the target. With our crew intact at the briefing room, we heard that Frankfurt, Germany will be the target for today.

We all remember some of the nasty stories that were told about earlier stories of mission to Frankfurt and it gave us food for thought of how rough it could be. This was our first mission into Germany itself. After we were flying at high altitude for a couple of hours George called our pilot, John Hodges, and reported that his electric suit hadn't been working and he was froze so bad, he couldn't take it anymore. I was ordered up to help George out of the ball turret and S/Sgt William Baker, waist gunner replaced George in the ball turret. Rutledge and I covered George with all the gear that was lying around as he was shaking uncontrollably. His face mask was solid white with frost and frozen to his face. We couldn't take it off as we were still flying at high altitude. I went back to my tail position. George said "I thought we would never reach England."

When we went over Frankfurt on our bomb run, we saw some flack and again, nothing like our first mission. We saw a few fighters but thanks to our fighter escort kept them at a distance. We took off on our mission at 7:46 AM and landed at our base at 16:49 PM. Total time of the mission was eight hours and thirty minutes. We only had two holes in our plane and five other ships had minor damage. George and I have twenty two missions to complete out tour.

The crew consisted of pilot Hodges, co-pilot Pettit, navigator Durante, bombardier Smith, engineer Nevilles, radio operator Joerger, waist gunner Rutlege, waist gunner George for Baker, ball turret Baker for George and I as tail gunner.

"MY FOURTH MISSION"

George and I flew our fourth mission on February 6, 1944 with crew 56 on our plane "Mr. Terrific" At the briefing room, we learned that the mission was to be an airfield at Evreux-Fouville, France, We were supposed to bomb Romilly, France, but as we were coming to the coast of France, we could see how cloudy it was and we were trying to make a visual bomb run and we had trouble trying to locate Romilly. We then went for

our secondary target. While we were circling around we flew over Paris, France. Every once in a while you got a glimpse of it. The flak, the Germans through up at us, was very intense and one of our bombers dropped out of formation and went into the clouds below us. We were unable to see any parachutes to see if anyone bailed out because of the clouds.

There were a few enemy planes near but our ever present fighter cover was on them in minutes. We were able to watch them for a few minutes till they disappeared in the clouds below. From our bomb group we lost plane # 145. This pilot of this plane was Lt. Reed and his crew from the 708 Bomb Squadron. Brother George, in his ball turret and I reported at our interrogation about seeing plane # 145 go down into the clouds below us. Neither one of us saw and parachutes coming from the plane. They reported them missing in action. In all, we had seventeen aircraft slightly damaged. Our plane was one of them that received a few holes. We took off at 7:22 AM and landed back at the base at 13: 15 PM. Total flying time was six hours and thirty-five minutes. We flew at an altitude of 19,000 feet and we were able to see some of France when ever you had a break in the clouds, which wasn't to often.

The crew consisted of pilot Hodges, copilot Pettit, Navigator Durante, bombardier Smith, engineer Nevilles, Radio Man Joerger, Waist gunners Baker and Rutledge, Ball Gunner George and I in the tail. George and I have 21 missions to go.



Photo of the Hodges crew, taken at Harvard AAB, October, 1943

Throughout his entries above, Joseph Klaput refers to a number of missions to go, totaling a 25-mission tour. Shortly after these descriptions end, the combat tour requirement was increased to 30 missions.

The Hodges crew had a turn of bad luck after these descriptions were written. On February 28, copilot Pettit and radio operator Joerger were killed while flying with the Fouts crew. Waist gunners Baker and Rutledge were on board another downed aircraft and were captured. On March 16, Arthur Durante was flying with the Huckins crew, was shot down and taken prisoner. On April 13, Hodges and Smith, flying with a composite crew, had to make a forced landing in Switzerland and were interned there.

Nevilles and the Klaput twins remained, reassigned as replacements as needed until they could complete their combat tour requirements. On May 12, 1944, nearing the end of his tour, Joseph Klaput took the place of Pettus crew tail gunner, Jack Keller -- grounded for medical reasons. One of seven planes lost that day, the entire crew, including Joseph Klaput, was captured in Germany. Only George Klaput and Donald Nevilles completed their 30-mission tours.

Today, the Klaput brothers and Jack Keller are good friends.