

**NARRATOR: Koehler, Patricia (Pat)**  
**INTERVIEWER: Ellen Haffner**  
**DATE: September 2, 2005**  
**LOCATION: Parma, Idaho**  
**PROJECT: Women in WWII/Veteran's History Project**

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**TAPE ONE**

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| 0000 | 1  | Introduction  |
| 0007 | 1  | Koehler explained how she ended up going to secretarial school after her graduation. Her father could not afford to send her to college, but he wanted to provide a way for her to earn a living. She discussed her time at Pitman's Secretarial School and described her first job working for the Odeon Theaters. She lived at home with her parents in Chislehurst, Kent.  |
| 0050 | 4  | Koehler shared what lead to her decision to join the service and told about her family's reaction. She decided to join the Royal Air Force [RAF]. She was assigned to be a clerk for Special Duties and went to work as a plotter. She shared that the RAF chose women who had been in boarding school to work in plotting because they could handle periods of being very busy followed by periods of being very bored. Koehler talked of a bomb landing outside of the place she was working. When she went to the induction center, they only stayed three days before being shipped out. They had to skip the training portion of their time there because there was so much destruction. |
| 0090 | 6  | Koehler spoke about being transferred to Edinburgh, Scotland, and about learning her job. After a few weeks she was sent to Stanmore, England, to work at fighter command headquarters. There she learned how to be a plotter. With prompting from the interviewer, Koehler talked more about some of the signs of fighting she saw in the months leading up to her joining the RAF. She saw dogfights overhead, and she witnessed many fires started from bombings. She also recalled hearing that the <i>Dorino</i> , a boat belonging to her father's friend, had been sunk.   |
| 0181 | 10 | Koehler described her first feelings after hearing that the War had begun. She remembered hearing Neville Chamberlain announce that Great Britain was at war. She said he sounded very sad. She wondered what her parents thought of going back to war after their experiences in World War I. She recalled the news talking about Chamberlain's efforts to work with Hitler. When she heard  |

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		Chamberlain declare that there was peace in our time, she felt that it was simply a way to delay the inevitable in order to prepare for war.
0240	13	Koehler talked about the different ways people dealt with the air raids. She never went to an air raid shelter until she was in the service. Some people went to live in some caves near Chislehurst when they lost their homes. Many installed Anderson shelters in their back yards and would go to them whenever a warning sounded. Her family just stayed in their home. Koehler also spoke of traveling by hitchhiking.
0285	14	Koehler spoke of the rationing in England. They had very little meat and only a few eggs a month. They encouraged everyone to grow victory gardens. Koehler was a volunteer to the Royal Air Force, but one year after this conscription went into effect so that every man and woman between the ages of seventeen to forty-five could be called up to serve. Koehler did not know the rules of exceptions from conscription. Some women joined the Red Cross and some became farm girls. Koehler shared her feelings about women serving on the front lines of war.
0365	17	<b>END OF TAPE ONE SIDE ONE TAPE ONE SIDE TWO</b>
0390	17	Koehler spoke more about the air raids of the Battle of Britain. They had to deal with bombings every night. One time when hitchhiking, she ran into the administrator of the Odeon Theaters. He lost his voice because bomb shrapnel had hit his throat. She also spoke about being picked up by three air marshals. They were interested to learn about her experiences as woman in the service. The people in England treated the women very well. Koehler talked about the hours of her job as a plotter. They had an ever changing eating and sleeping schedule.
0440	20	Koehler explained that they would sing songs as they waited to be picked up while hitchhiking. She shared stories about having a crush on one of the controllers. He once took Koehler and some other women out to see a crashed B-17 in a field. Koehler talked about her cousin Fred who served in the RAF. She explained that he died in the fighting. She received a letter telling her of his death when she had just mailed a letter off to Fred.
0480	21	Koehler talked about being billeted in private homes in Preston. She did not get along with the first couple she stayed with. Then while staying with another couple, her room caught fire while she was on duty on Christmas. She finally found a good place to stay in the third home. She and a friend of hers, Tony, would play cards with

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		the couple she stayed with. Tony was her boyfriend until they both were stationed in different places in Ireland. After being in Preston for several months she was sent to Stormont, Ireland, to work at RAF Northern Ireland headquarters.
0515	23	Koehler spoke about the place where they worked. In Stormont she was transferred to a new job working in the control room. She became close friends with a man by the name of George Knox who she called her fairy godfather. Koehler shared a story about the RAF trying to sink two German battleships. She also told of tracking on RADAR the airplane Hess flew to England.
0565	25	Koehler explained more details about her new job. While there she met the Duke of Kent. She spoke about some of the places she visited in Ireland. She told about hitchhiking to Dublin with a friend on a dare. When they arrived they bought some rationed items and threw open the windows with the lights on at night. Dublin was neutral at this time. On the way back to the base, they rode with a doctor who sped quickly to get them back in time to go on duty.
0640	28	Koehler detailed the proper procedure for going to Dublin and the reasons for these procedures. Koehler described the uniforms. The women mostly wore their uniforms. They dressed the same as the men. They also had civilian clothes that they would wear to go out in their off time. They called it mufti.
0730	32	Koehler described their beds and the homes they stayed in. After awhile they put up Nissan huts for the women to stay in. Koehler shared some pictures.
<b>0786</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>END OF TAPE ONE SIDE TWO TAPE TWO SIDE ONE</b>
0000	33	Tape two introduction
0007	34	Koehler continued describing her housing in Northern Ireland. They were very cold and sparse quarters. On the trip to Ireland she met Patty who was became a very close friend. Koehler talked about one negative experience she had when trying to find a place to stay in a Catholic town. She and a friend of hers could not get a place at the inn because they were in uniform. The friend she was with suggested that they go to the home of the head of the church. They went to the home of the dean of Down Patrick and asked to speak to the dean. He allowed them to stay with him for the night and fed them the next morning. When she returned to camp, they were questioned closely about being gone but were dismissed without punishment.

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0065	37	Koehler talked about some of the people she worked with. She was close with George Knox who took care of her like a father would. Koehler shared how she met the American lieutenant who would later become her husband, Jim Koehler. They met at a dance. Koehler thought the music was weird, and she had never known about the American practice of tapping the shoulder of the man dancing to claim the next dance with the woman. When Jim walked her home that night, they walked past the gate where the men were supposed to leave the women accidentally and had to hide in the woods to keep from getting caught.
0105	39	Koehler explained that George made an effort to meet Jim when he heard the Koehler was falling in love with him. He checked him out to make sure it was okay for them to date. She described her first date with Jim. They went to the 400 club nearby. After several dates Jim asked Koehler to marry her and come to America after the War. Koehler responded by saying, "Are you drunk?" When she realized he was serious, she said yes.
0140	40	Koehler spoke about the British Naval Lieutenant she was dating before she met Jim. He disappeared when his convoy to Malta was attacked, and he resurfaced several months later. By then Koehler had been engaged for some time to Jim. Koehler talked about the different music styles and dances that they would have at the 400 club.
0180	43	Koehler talked about moving into the job of working in RADAR. She described the system and the duties of her job. She talked about some of the hitchhiking trips they went on while in Ballywooden. On one trip they were picked up by a family by the name of Ferguson that invited them to lunch. They became good friends with this family and often visited them in their very nice home that was a converted abbey.
0260	46	Koehler kept in touch with Jim when he was sent to Northern Africa. It took six weeks to two months because the letters had to travel to America and then back to be delivered. Koehler told a story about receiving one letter from Jim expressing some doubts about their engagement. It was several weeks before she heard that he was okay with it again. Koehler described her family's reaction when she told them about her marrying an American. Her mother understood, but her father didn't like that he was an American. However, once he met Jim, her father accepted the marriage.
0310	48	Koehler explained the time that Jim had to introduce himself to her parents before she returned on leave. She told how she heard he had

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		arrived at her parents' home. A few hours after he got back, she was allowed off duty and sent to go home and get married. Koehler's father was upset that Jim didn't ask his permission. He was also very mad that the American's sent people to investigate Koehler's family before Jim could marry her.
0380	50	<b>END OF TAPE TWO SIDE ONE TAPE TWO SIDE TWO</b>
0388	50	Koehler described her preparations for the wedding and honeymoon. She wasn't sure exactly when Jim would be home so she made the plans and simply hoped they would work out. They had a nice honeymoon at an 11 <sup>th</sup> century inn, and the timing worked out perfectly. Koehler said that the American soldiers treated the British women in the service very well. There was friction between British soldiers and American soldiers because the Americans made more money and often took the women away from the British soldiers. Koehler explained that the food that the Americans had would attract the women to parties thrown by the Navy when she was in Hope Cove.
0440	53	Koehler talked about the openness of dating in the British service. They did not have any rules about officers dating only officers the way the American armed services did. Koehler explained how she ended up in Hope Cove. She was unhappy at Ballywooden because there was a WAF commander that she could not get along with. Koehler shared a story about several cadets grabbing this commander and dumping her in a ditch to get revenge for the women. They considered these cadets to be knights coming to the rescue. This combined with her close friend being transferred elsewhere left Koehler depressed. So she put in for a transfer.
0480	55	Koehler shared her first reaction upon arriving in Hope Cove, Devon, England. She thought it was a beautiful seaside resort village. She enjoyed her time there working in RADAR and spending time with some new friends. During the preparations for D-Day everyone was confined to camp and had to eat the same rations as the soldiers heading to Europe. She told how her friend Polly was worried when her husband disappeared in the days after D-Day. They celebrated when they heard that he was safe.
0510	57	Koehler explained that Polly's husband Bill had survived Dunkirk, D-Day, and the Rhine crossing only to commit suicide several decades later because he did not want to become an invalid. Koehler reflected on the strangeness of this situation. Koehler continued by telling about Bill hitchhiking down to Hope Cove from Northern England so that he could spend V-E day with Polly. He even stole a

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		jeep from some Americans and drove it until it ran out of gas. Koehler described the hotel that they stayed in while at Hope Cove.
<b>0560</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>END OF TAPE TWO SIDE TWO END OF INTERVIEW</b>

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**NAMES AND PLACES INDEX**

Balleywooden, Northern Ireland  
Battle of Britain  
Belfast, Northern Ireland  
Chamberlain, Neville  
Chislehurst, Kent, England  
Down Patrick, Ireland  
Dublin, Ireland  
Edinburgh, Scotland  
*Gneisenau, The*  
Hope Cove, England  
Knox, George  
Koehler, Jim  
Preston, Lancashire, England  
*Scharnhorst, The*  
Stanmore, England