

“A wartime coincidence”

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In 1940 Jock Rolland OGC 1934 enlisted into the RAAF where he would begin his journey to a remarkable wartime coincidence.



Jock Rolland

Jock Rolland came from a The Geelong College pedigree. Nephew of the well respected and long serving principal Rev Frank Rolland and great grandson of college founder Dr Alexander Campbell, Jock attended the school from 1937-1938.

In March 1941 Jock was called up and posted for training at a series of schools in Canada. As a newly appointed Officer he then set sail for the UK. The RAAF 461 Squadron was formed on Anzac Day in 1942 into which all Canadian trained pilots and navigators were transferred.

The 461 Squadron was part of a long campaign in the Battle of the Atlantic. The German Navy and Air Force were intent on disrupting the important supply lines to Britain. The 461

Squadron formed part of the Allied effort to patrol and protect the supply ships.

“Our really big day came on 31 July 1943,” recalls Jock in his brother Derrick’s (OGC 1939) book *Airmen I have met* (1999).

Derrick Rolland recounts:

“[Sunderland “U” of 461 Squadron] set out on an anti-submarine patrol in the Bay of Biscay. Manned by a crew of 12 under the command of Flight Lieutenant Dudley Marrows. The navigator was Flight Lieutenant Jock Rolland (my brother). They received a message from Group HQ to join in an action against a pack of U-boats. On arrival at the scene there were three U-boats on the surface.”



Dudley Marrows Captain Sunderland U461, Wolf Stiebler Captain U-Boat 461 and Peter Jensen WOP at the War Memorial, Canberra.

In a daring manoeuvre Dudley flew close to a U-boat in the face of cannon and machine gun fire, and dropped a depth charge.

Dudley recalls, "I had to pull up violently to avoid hitting the conning tower. I had no idea of how successful my attack had been until my navigator, Jock Rolland, called out on the intercom, "You got one". Rolland was still leaning out of the Sunderland hatch, photographing the result of the attack, despite the fact that I was putting the aircraft through violent turns to avoid the U-boat fire. We flew over the scene to find a great oil slick where the submarine had been. About 30 survivors, wearing only life jackets, were observed. We made another run over the scene and dropped a life raft."

Thus, it was that Sunderland "U" of 461 Squadron sank U-boat 461

Dropping the life raft for the survivors proved a controversial and risky decision in the face of damage inflicted to the aircraft. Britain's RAF reprimanded Marrows for jettisoning a raft intended to save Sunderland's crew if it was shot down.

In this wartime victory there was also a victory for humanity. The controversial decision to drop their life raft would save the U-boat 461 survivors.

Years after the war a reunion was organised between the Sunderland "U" of 461 crew and U-boat 461 survivors. At the reunion pilot Dudley's wife was thanked by the wife of the U-boat's Captain, Wolf Stiebler.

"Please thank your husband for giving me the many happy years of marriage I have had."

From then old enemies became good friends.

Jock was later transferred to the RAAF 40 Squadron, coming closer to home to ferry personnel and supplies between Australia and New Guinea. He was discharged in 1946 and later trained and worked as a dentist. His son, John, also attended the College.

His lasting impression of war was that "there is nothing pretty about war except flying over a carpet of strato-cumulus on a full moon night."