

= Charles Eaton (RAAF officer) =

Charles Eaton , OBE , AFC (21 December 1895 – 12 November 1979) was a senior officer and aviator in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) , who later served as a diplomat . Born in London , he joined the British Army upon the outbreak of World War I and saw action on the Western Front before transferring to the Royal Flying Corps in 1917 . Posted as a bomber pilot to No. 206 Squadron , he was twice captured by German forces , and twice escaped . Eaton left the military in 1920 and worked in India until moving to Australia in 1923 . Two years later he joined the RAAF , serving initially as an instructor at No. 1 Flying Training School . Between 1929 and 1931 , he was chosen to lead three expeditions to search for lost aircraft in Central Australia , gaining national attention and earning the Air Force Cross for his " zeal and devotion to duty " .

In 1939 , on the eve of World War II , Eaton became the inaugural commanding officer of No. 12 (General Purpose) Squadron at the newly established RAAF Station Darwin in Northern Australia . Promoted group captain the following year , he was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 1942 . He took command of No. 79 Wing at Batchelor , Northern Territory , in 1943 , and was mentioned in despatches during operations in the South West Pacific . Retiring from the RAAF in December 1945 , Eaton took up diplomatic posts in the Dutch East Indies , heading a United Nations commission as Consul @-@ General during the Indonesian National Revolution . He returned to Australia in 1950 , and served in Canberra for a further two years . Popularly known as " Moth " Eaton , he was a farmer in later life , and died in 1979 at the age of 83 . He is commemorated by several memorials in the Northern Territory .

= = Early life and World War I = =

Charles Eaton was born on 21 December 1895 in Lambeth , London , the son of William Walpole Eaton , a butcher , and his wife Grace . Schooled in Wandsworth , Charles worked in Battersea Town Council from the age of fourteen , before joining the London Regiment upon the outbreak of World War I in August 1914 . Attached to a bicycle company in the 24th Battalion of the 47th Division , he arrived at the Western Front in March 1915 . He took part in trench bombing missions and attacks on enemy lines of communication , seeing action in the Battles of Aubers Ridge , Festubert , Loos , and the Somme .

On 14 May 1915 , Eaton transferred to the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) , undergoing initial pilot training at Oxford . While he was landing his Maurice Farman Shorthorn at the end of his first solo flight , another student collided with him and was killed , but Eaton emerged uninjured . He was commissioned in August and was awarded his wings in October . Ranked lieutenant , he served with No. 110 Squadron , which operated Martinsyde G.100 " Elephant " fighters out of Sedgeford , defending London against Zeppelin airships . Transferred to the newly formed Royal Air Force (RAF) in April 1918 , he was posted the following month to France flying Airco DH.9 single @-@ engined bombers with No. 206 Squadron . On 29 June , he was shot down behind enemy lines and captured in the

vicinity of Nieppe . Incarcerated in Holzminden prisoner @-@ of @-@ war camp , Germany , Eaton escaped but was recaptured and court @-@ martialled , after which he was kept in solitary confinement . He later effected another escape and succeeded in rejoining his squadron in the final days of the war .

= = Between the wars = =

Eaton remained in the RAF following the cessation of hostilities . He married Beatrice Godfrey in St. Thomas 's church at Shepherd 's Bush , London , on 11 January 1919 . Posted to No. 1 Squadron , he was a pilot on the first regular passenger service between London and Paris , ferrying delegates to and from the Peace Conference at Versailles . Eaton was sent to India in December to undertake aerial survey work , including the first such survey of the Himalayas . He resigned from the RAF in July 1920 , remaining in India to take up employment with the Imperial Forest Service . After successfully applying for a position with the Queensland Forestry Service , he and his family migrated to Australia in 1923 . Moving to South Yarra , Victoria , he enlisted as a flying officer in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) at Laverton on 14 August 1925 . He was posted to No. 1 Flying Training School at RAAF Point Cook , as a flight instructor , where he became known as a strict disciplinarian who " trained his pilots well " . Here Eaton acquired his nickname of " Moth " , the Air Force 's basic trainer at this time being the De Havilland DH.60 Moth . Promoted flight lieutenant in February 1928 , he flew a Moth in the 1929 East @-@ West Air Race from Sydney to Perth , as part of the celebrations for the Western Australia Centenary ; he was the sixth competitor across the line , after fellow RFC veteran Jerry Pentland .

Regarded as one of the RAAF 's most skilful cross @-@ country pilots and navigators , Eaton came to public attention as leader of three military expeditions to find lost aircraft in Central Australia between 1929 and 1931 . In April 1929 , he coordinated the Air Force 's part in the search for aviators Keith Anderson and Bob Hitchcock , missing in their aircraft the Kookaburra while themselves looking for Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm , who had force landed the Southern Cross in north Western Australia during a flight from Sydney . Three of the RAAF 's five " ancient " DH.9 biplanes went down in the search – though all crews escaped injury – including Eaton 's , which experienced what he labelled " a good crash " on 21 April near Tennant Creek after the engine 's pistons melted . The same day , Captain Lester Brain , flying a Qantas aircraft , located the wreck of the Kookaburra in the Tanami Desert , approximately 130 kilometres (81 mi) east @-@ south @-@ east of Wave Hill . Setting out from Wave Hill on 23 April , Eaton led a ground party across rough terrain that reached the crash site four days later and buried the crew , who had perished of thirst and exposure . Not a particularly religious man , he recalled that after the burial he saw a perfect cross formed by cirrus cloud in an otherwise clear blue sky above the Kookaburra . The Air Board described the RAAF 's search as taking 240 hours flying time " under the most trying conditions ... where a forced landing meant certain crash " . In November 1930 , Eaton was selected to lead another

expedition for a missing aircraft near Ayers Rock , but it was called off soon afterwards when the pilot showed up in Alice Springs . The next month , he was ordered to search for W.L. Pittendrigh and S.J. Hamre , who had disappeared in the biplane Golden Quest 2 while attempting to discover Lasseter 's Reef . Employing a total of four DH.60 Moths , the RAAF team located the missing men near Dashwood Creek on 7 January 1931 , and they were rescued four days later by a ground party accompanied by Eaton . Staying in nearby Alice Springs , he recommended a site for the town 's new airfield , which was approved and has remained in use since its construction .

Eaton was awarded the Air Force Cross on 10 March 1931 " in recognition of his zeal and devotion to duty in conducting flights to Central Australia in search of missing aviators " . The media called him the " ' Knight Errant ' of the desert skies " . Aside from his crash landing in the desert while searching for the Kookaburra , Eaton had another narrow escape in 1929 when he was test flying the Wackett Warrigal I with Sergeant Eric Douglas . Having purposely put the biplane trainer into a spin and finding no response in the controls when he tried to recover , Eaton called on Douglas to bail out . When Douglas stood up to do so , the spin stopped , apparently due to his torso changing the airflow over the tail plane . Eaton then managed to land the aeroplane , he and his passenger both badly shaken by the experience . In December 1931 , he was posted to No. 1 Aircraft Depot at Laverton , where he continued to fly as well as performing administrative work . Promoted squadron leader in 1936 , he undertook a clandestine mission around the new year to scout for suitable landing grounds in the Dutch East Indies , primarily Timor and Ambon . Wearing civilian clothes , he and his companion were arrested and held for three days by local authorities in Koepang , Dutch Timor . Eaton was appointed commanding officer (CO) of No. 21 Squadron in May 1937 , one of his first tasks being to undertake another aerial search in Central Australia , this time for prospector Sir Herbert Gepp , who was subsequently discovered alive and well . Later that year , Eaton presided over the court of inquiry into the crash of a Hawker Demon biplane in Victoria , recommending a gallantry award for Aircraftman William McAloney , who had leapt into the Demon 's burning wreckage in an effort to rescue its pilot ; McAloney subsequently received the Albert Medal for his heroism .

Following a 1937 decision to establish the first north Australian RAAF base , in April 1938 Eaton , now on the headquarters staff of RAAF Station Laverton , and Wing Commander George Jones , Director of Personnel Services at RAAF Headquarters , began developing plans for the new station , to be commanded by Jones , and a new squadron that would be based there , led by Eaton . The next month they flew an Avro Anson on an inspection tour of Darwin , Northern Territory , site of the proposed base . Delays meant that No. 12 (General Purpose) Squadron was not formed until 6 February 1939 at Laverton . Jones had by now moved on to another posting but Eaton took up the squadron 's command as planned . Promoted to wing commander on 1 March , he and his equipment officer , Flying Officer Hocking , were ordered to build up the unit as quickly as possible , and established an initial complement of fourteen officers and 120

airmen , plus four Ansons and four Demons , within a week . An advance party of thirty NCOs and airmen under Hocking began moving to Darwin on 1 July . Staff were initially accommodated in a former meatworks built during World War I , and life at the newly established air base had a " distinctly raw , pioneering feel about it " according to historian Chris Coulthard @-@ Clark . Morale , though , was high . On 31 August , No. 12 Squadron launched its first patrol over the Darwin area , flown by one of seven Ansons that had so far been delivered . These were augmented by a flight of four CAC Wirraways (replacing the originally planned force of Demons) that took off from Laverton on 2 September , the day before Australia declared war , and arrived in Darwin four days later . A fifth Wirraway in the flight crashed on landing at Darwin , killing both crewmen .

= = World War II = =

Once war was declared , Darwin began to receive more attention from military planners . In June 1940 , No. 12 Squadron was " cannibalised " to form two additional units , Headquarters RAAF Station Darwin and No. 13 Squadron . No. 12 Squadron retained its Wirraway flight , while its two flights of Ansons went to the new squadron ; these were replaced later that month by more capable Lockheed Hudsons . Eaton was appointed CO of the base , gaining promotion to temporary group captain in September . His squadrons were employed in escort , maritime reconnaissance , and coastal patrol duties , the overworked aircraft having to be sent to RAAF Station Richmond , New South Wales , after every 240 hours flying time - with a consequent three @-@ week loss from Darwin 's strength - as deep maintenance was not yet possible in the Northern Territory . Soon after the establishment of Headquarters RAAF Station Darwin , Minister for Air James Fairbairn visited the base . Piloting his own light plane , he was greeted by four Wirraways that proceeded to escort him into landing ; the Minister subsequently complimented Eaton on the " keen @-@ ness and efficiency of all ranks " , particularly considering the challenging environment . When Fairbairn died in the Canberra air disaster shortly afterwards , his pilot was Flight Lieutenant Robert Hitchcock , son of Bob Hitchcock of the Kookaburra and also a former member of Eaton 's No. 21 Squadron .

As senior air commander in the region , Eaton sat on the Darwin Defence Co @-@ ordination Committee . He was occasionally at loggerheads with his naval counterpart , Captain E.P. Thomas , and also incurred the ire of trade unionists when he used RAAF staff to unload ships in Port Darwin during industrial action ; Eaton himself took part in the work , shovelling coal alongside his men . On 25 February 1941 , he made a flight north to reconnoitre Timor , Ambon , and Babo in Dutch New Guinea for potential use by the RAAF in any Pacific conflict . By April , the total strength based at RAAF Station Darwin had increased to almost 700 officers and airmen ; by the following month it had been augmented by satellite airfields at Bathurst Island , Groote Eylandt , Batchelor , and Katherine . Handing over command of Darwin to Group Captain Frederick Scherger in October , Eaton took charge of No. 2 Service

Flying Training School near Wagga Wagga , New South Wales . His " marked success " , " untiring energy " , and " tact in handling men " while in the Northern Territory were recognised in the new year with his appointment as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire . Eaton became CO of No. 1 Engineering School and its base , RAAF Station Ascot Vale , Victoria , in April 1942 . Twelve months later in Townsville , Queensland , he formed No. 72 Wing , which subsequently deployed to Merauke in Dutch New Guinea , comprising No. 84 Squadron (flying CAC Boomerang fighters) , No. 86 Squadron (P @-@ 40 Kittyhawk fighters) , and No. 12 Squadron (A @-@ 31 Vengeance dive bombers) . His relations with North @-@ Eastern Area Command in Townsville were strained ; " mountains were made out of molehills " in his opinion , and he was reassigned that July to lead No. 2 Bombing and Gunnery School in Port Pirie , South Australia .

On 30 November 1943 , Eaton returned to the Northern Territory to establish No. 79 Wing at Batchelor , comprising No. 1 and No. 2 Squadrons (flying Bristol Beaufort light reconnaissance bombers) , No. 31 Squadron (Bristol Beaufighter long @-@ range fighters) , and No. 18 (Netherlands East Indies) Squadron (B @-@ 25 Mitchell medium bombers) . He developed a good relationship with his Dutch personnel , who called him " Oom Charles " (Uncle Charles) . Operating under the auspices of North @-@ Western Area Command (NWA) , Darwin , Eaton 's forces participated in the New Guinea and North @-@ Western Area Campaigns during 1944 , in which he regularly flew on missions himself . Through March - April , his Beaufighters attacked enemy shipping , while the Mitchells and Beauforts bombed Timor on a daily basis as a prelude to Operations Reckless and Persecution , the invasions of Hollandia and Aitape . On 19 April , he organised a large raid against Su , Dutch Timor , employing thirty @-@ five Mitchells , Beauforts and Beaufighters to destroy the town 's barracks and fuel dumps , the results earning him the personal congratulations of the Air Officer Commanding NWA , Air Vice Marshal " King " Cole , for his " splendid effort " . On the day of the Allied landings , 22 April , the Mitchells and Beaufighters made a daylight raid on Dili , Portuguese Timor . The ground assault met little opposition , credited in part to the air bombardment in the days leading up to it . In June - July , No. 79 Wing supported the Allied attack on Noemfoor . Eaton was recommended to be mentioned in despatches on 28 October 1944 for his " Gallant and distinguished service " in NWA ; this was promulgated in the London Gazette on 9 March 1945 .

Completing his tour with No. 79 Wing , Eaton was appointed Air Officer Commanding Southern Area , Melbourne , in January 1945 . The German submarine U @-@ 862 operated off southern Australia during the first months of 1945 , and the few combat units in Eaton 's command were heavily engaged in anti @-@ submarine patrols which sought to locate this and any other U @-@ boats in the area . The Air Officer Commanding RAAF Command , Air Vice Marshal Bill Bostock , considered the sporadic attacks to be partly " nuisance value " , designed to draw Allied resources away from the front line of the South West Pacific war . In April , Eaton complained to Bostock that intelligence from British Pacific Fleet concerning its ships ' movements eastwards out of Western Area was hours out of date by the time it was received at Southern Area Command , leading

to RAAF aircraft missing their rendezvous and wasting valuable flying hours searching empty ocean . There had been no U @-@ boat strikes since February , and by June the naval authorities indicated that there was no pressing need for air cover except for the most important vessels .

= = Post @-@ war career and legacy = =

Eaton retired from the RAAF on 31 December 1945 . In recognition of his war service , he was appointed a Commander of the Order of Orange @-@ Nassau with Swords by the Dutch government on 17 January 1946 . The same month , he became Australian consul in Dili . He had seen an advertisement for the position and was the only applicant with experience of the area . While based there , he accompanied the provincial governor on visits to townships damaged in Allied raids during the war , taking care to be circumspect about the part played by his own forces from No. 79 Wing . In July 1947 , Dutch forces launched a " police action " against territory held by the fledgling Indonesian Republic , which had been declared shortly after the end of the war . Following a ceasefire , the United Nations set up a commission , chaired by Eaton as Consul @-@ General , to monitor progress . Eaton and his fellow commissioners believed that the ceasefire was serving the Dutch as a cover for further penetration of republican enclaves . His requests to the Australian government for military observers led to deployment of the first peacekeeping force to the region ; the Australians were soon followed by British and US observers , and enabled Eaton to display a more realistic impression of the situation to the outside world . The Dutch administration strongly opposed the presence of UN forces and accused Eaton of " impropriety " , but the Australian government refused to recall him . Following the transfer of sovereignty in December 1949 , he became Australia 's first secretary and chargé d 'affaires to the Republic of the United States of Indonesia . In 1950 , he returned to Australia to serve with the Department of External Affairs in Canberra . After retiring from public service in 1951 , he and his wife farmed at Metung , Victoria , and cultivated orchids . They later moved to Frankston , where Eaton was involved in promotional work .

Charles Eaton died in Frankston on 12 November 1979 . Survived by his wife and two sons , he was cremated . In accordance with his wishes , his ashes were scattered near Tennant Creek , site of his 1929 forced landing during the search for the Kookaburra , from an RAAF Caribou on 15 April 1981 . His name figures prominently in the Northern Territory , commemorated by Lake Eaton in Central Australia , Eaton Place in the Darwin suburb of Karama , Charles Eaton Drive on the approach to Darwin International Airport , and the Charles Moth Eaton Saloon Bar in the Tennant Creek Goldfields Hotel . He is also honoured with a display at the Northern Territory Parliament , and a National Trust memorial at Tennant Creek Airport . At the RAAF 's 2003 History Conference , Air Commodore Mark Lax , recalling Eaton 's search @-@ and @-@ rescue missions between the wars , commented : " Today , we might think of Eaton perhaps as the pioneer of our contribution to assistance to the civil community – a tradition that continues today . Perhaps I might

jog your memory to a more recent series of rescues no less hazardous for all concerned – the amazing location of missing yachtsmen Thierry Dubois , Isabelle Autissier and Tony Bullimore by our P @-@ 3s that guided the Navy to their eventual rescue . My observation is that such activities remain vital for our relevance in that we must remain connected , supportive and responsive to the wants and needs of the Australian community . "