

## **Group Captain Eaton – Australia’s Consul in Timor**

*We present below two of 30 “Vignettes” written by Charles Stuart Eaton about the life of his father. These are shortly to be published and we are grateful to Mr Eaton for permitting their publication here.*



**Australia’s first Consul to Portuguese Timor, Charles Eaton, and his younger son arriving at Dili’s ‘wharf’ by lighter from HMS Camperdown, January 1946**

### **The ‘The Hitch-Hiking Consul’: Our Man in Timor, 1946**

***The Right Man:** Group Captain Charles ‘Moth’ Eaton, last heard of in Darwin thumbing his way to Portuguese Timor, where he is to reign as Consul, is the most appropriate appointment we have made since the war. Wasn’t he the Eaton I remember leading our Beaufighter squadrons from Batchelor in 1943–4 to bomb the daylight out of Timor? It was terrific. Not a worthwhile centre in Timor remained*

*intact. It will be Group Captain Eaton's job to help, I suppose, in the rebuilding. I am sure it will be a pleasure.*<sup>1</sup>

Charles' first introduction to the island of Timor was in mid-1938. In January of that year, the British Consul-General in Batavia warned Australia 'to consider seriously the adoption of a definite policy to establish an interest in Timor to counter-balance Japanese activities'. The warning continued by saying that it was time to 'take a leaf out of the Japanese book and acquire a footing [in Timor] even if bears no financial promise'.<sup>2</sup>

In May of 1938, Charles reputedly visited West Timor on a surveillance mission to assess Japanese influence in eastern Netherlands East Indies (Vignette 17). Three years later, he was sent to Kupang in Dutch-controlled West Timor, Dutch New Guinea and the Molucca islands by the Australian Government on a fact-finding mission directly related to Australia's defence (Vignette 20).

Although neutral in the conflict, Portuguese Timor was in the frontline throughout the Pacific war. Australia unilaterally sent troops to the Portuguese colony in late 1941 to forestall a possible Japanese occupation, which was technically an 'act of aggression' against a neutral country. The Japanese then invaded in February 1942. More than 40,000 East Timorese may have died as a result of conflict and starvation.

Former diplomat James Dunn wrote in 1964:

*In most parts of the colony the war had a devastating effect on the livelihood of the Timorese. Many farms were abandoned, especially in fighting zones, and most of what little food production there was went in forced deliveries to the Japanese. In addition to the destruction caused by the war and by the looting of the occupiers, the Timorese had to endure devastating bombing raids by Allied aircraft operating out of Darwin.*

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<sup>1</sup> M Lockwood, 30 January 1946.

<sup>2</sup> C Archer, 1941.

By the end of the war in 1945, Australia acknowledged the strategic importance of Timor and agreed with Portugal's proposal that diplomatic links be formalised. A few weeks before his retirement from the RAAF, Charles read an advertisement for a consular appointment to Dili; he remarked, '*Yes, I know it well...bombed it from one end to the other,*' and applied for the position. Although Charles had visited Dutch Timor, he had not been to the Portuguese colony. As the only applicant with any knowledge of the region, he was tasked to create a diplomatic mission from scratch. He was provided with a construction team, a jeep and an army 'blitz-buggy' truck. Eleven builders, the vehicles, building materials and Charles' personal effects were to be ferried to Dili from Darwin on the SS *Quanza*. The initial, temporary consulate was to include two staff houses; ancillary buildings were to include a shower house, latrines and a garage '*of the simplest design*'.

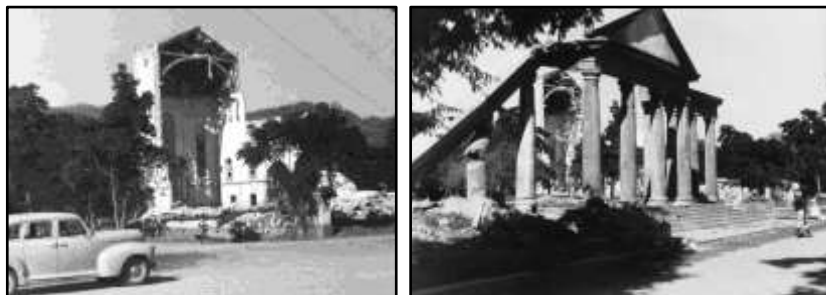
The jeep and truck were driven by Charles and army drivers overland from Alice Springs to Darwin to await the SS *Quanza*. Charles wanted to get to Dili without delay to arrange his diplomatic accreditation and organise the logistics for the construction team. On arriving in Darwin, he found the *Quanza* delayed and no transport heading in the right direction. Son Charles Stuart, who accompanied him, knew the impatient man his father was and thought he was like 'a cat on a hot tin roof' seeking any possible way to get to Timor. Journalist Douglas Lockwood learnt of Charles' predicament and splashed the story in the national media that, '*Charles Eaton is stranded in Darwin and must be the only hitch-hiking Consul in the world.*' After some delay, Charles flagged down a ride on a passing British destroyer, the HMS *Camperdown*, under the command of Lieutenant Commander James Yorke, DSC.

On reaching Dili, the *Camperdown* anchored offshore and the consul-designate and his son were rowed ashore to Dili's temporary wharf—all that remained since 79 Wing had obliterated the original wharf leaving it hardly able to handle a canoe, let alone a destroyer. In fact, as a later consul, James Dunn, wrote, Dili had been '*almost bombed out of existence*'. The new acting Governor of Portuguese

Timor, Captain Oscar Freire de Vasconcelos Ruas, accommodated the Eatons at his residence, a substantial Baroque building on the outskirts of Dili. Shortly after Charles' arrival, Ruas asked him to arrange for an estimation of costs for a new Dili jetty.

Charles soon cemented contacts with Portuguese officials and visited Timor's interior to meet those Timorese who had supported Australian soldiers during the war and to assess the state of the colony's food supply. The Governor also requested that Charles examine the proposed site of an international airport at Baucau and visit Nova Dili, a planned new township just eight miles inland from Dili. After three weeks, father and son returned to Australia and were reunited with Bea in Melbourne; Charles senior returned to Dili at the end of April. He reported in May: *'The position of the Timorese seems to be one of general improvement. Food requirements have improved and the natives are regaining their strength although many are still suffering the general privations of Japanese occupation.'*

Consul Eaton first focused on the rehabilitation of the colony, conscious that his own squadrons had inflicted the greater part of the damage throughout the whole of Timor. He suggested to Bea and his son that it would be indiscreet to emphasise that his command was responsible for the destruction of Dili's cathedral and churches in Baucau, Ermera, Venilale, Ainaro and the large building at Hatolia, even though Allied intelligence had identified the holy places as munitions dumps and Hatolia as a Japanese Army HQ.



**The Cathedral (left) and Câmara Municipal (right) in Dili, destroyed by 79 Wing, 1943–44**

Charles noted that 250 Timorese who had collaborated with the Japanese during the war had been deported to Atauro Island. Atauro was also the depository of ‘left-wing’ dissidents from Portugal who, when released, were allowed to remain in the colony as *deportados*. Many *deportados* had helped the Australian soldiers in the mountains during the Japanese occupation and a number had lost their lives. Despite Charles forming a close relationship with Governor Ruas and his staff, he was never allowed to visit the island or know who was interned. He dubbed Atauro ‘The Island of the Unknown’. Charles believed that the numbers of Portuguese and Timorese who allegedly collaborated with the Japanese were exaggerated. Many remained neutral and a substantial number supported Australian commandos in 1942.

Construction of the consulate progressed well, apart from delays in the supply of building materials due to spasmodic shipping. Charles recommended that the Australian tradesmen building the consulate be allowed to remain in Timor if they so desired. Some had formed personal relationships and were enjoying the easy ‘simpatico Latino’ lifestyle. This suited Charles, who was anxious to build up and strengthen an Australian presence in Timor. Although few in number, the Australian workmen had pushed the black-market value of the local currency, the pataca, up 25 per cent.

The general economic situation in Timor on Charles’ arrival was poor. He wrote that there was much rehabilitation work to be done but the lack of equipment and machinery was a great handicap, adding that ‘*Sawmills brought in from Australia are electrically driven, [but] without power, are useless at the present time.*’ Most of the rebuilding and the construction of Baucau airport was carried out manually.

Charles was often seen touring with Governor Ruas, so much so that locals dubbed him ‘*Grande Carlos de Deputado Governador*’ to everybody’s amusement, including the governor’s.<sup>3</sup> Ruas would

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<sup>3</sup> E. Simões, personal communication.

commandeer the Portuguese Air Force's only DH-82 Tiger Moth in Timor and request Charles to fly him around his domain. Apparently, the consul's superiors in Canberra never learnt of his extra-consular duties as the governor's honorary pilot. Charles started to teach his Timorese driver, Ernesto Simões, the fundamentals of flying then applied to purchase a Tiger Moth for the consulate. Perhaps wisely, Canberra declined Charles' request, which left Ernesto a disappointed man.

Many Portuguese, Timorese and Chinese attended the consulate's opening ceremony on 2 July 1946, witnessing the raising of a composite Australian flag made from a gifted Mercantile Marine flag and locally made blue jean denim material. A fortnight later Charles was present at the confirmation of Captain Ruas as governor. He wrote:

*At the Palace I witnessed quite an imposing display of welcome from the natives. Parade, march past and general order was good and the dress and bearing, although unorthodox to our standards, was both original and interesting and without doubt strong loyalty was displayed.*



***Liurai (Chiefs) of Fatu-Maca de Cima, who met Charles in July 1946***

After Charles also made a courtesy call on the Chinese community in July. Their leader, Chung Hean Chung, spoke of the strong ties the community had with the Portuguese, who had been *'the earliest discoverers so figuring in the History of the Evolution of Man'*. Chung continued:

*Thanks to the Victory of the Allied Nations, for today, I am very glad to state that we are happy and free of the god-forsaken and barbarous Japanese occupation. Before the outbreak of the South Pacific War, your Country showed a great interest to link this Colony with commerce and various products of Portuguese Timor were exported to Australia and products imported therefrom. Now, we presume the same or even better goodwill exists between the two Nations, therefore it is our ardent desire that soon may arrive the day to mark the beginning of the progress with regular commercial communications established. This, as businessmen, we are earnestly looking for.*

*Viva Portugal! Viva Australia! Viva China!*

Bea Eaton joined her husband in late July. They drove into the hinterland, where they were particularly impressed with the beautiful countryside of Ossu and the 'Lost World of Mundo Perdido', which they toured on Timor ponies. The Eatons were impressed with the agriculture of the area and visited experimental plantations of cocoa, sandalwood and rubber. In August they visited the *posto*<sup>4</sup> of Aileu, Maubisse and Ainaro.

Unfortunately, the vehicle of Vassalo da Silva, a former acting governor who was travelling ahead of the consular party, ran off the tortuous road to Ainaro. Charles arrived just a few minutes afterwards, applied first aid to the seriously injured da Silva and took him the 44 miles to Aileu and a doctor. Fortunately, Senor da Silva made a full recovery.

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<sup>4</sup> Posto - an administrative district.

By October the lack of shipping resulted in the consulate having to cut back on its tours because petrol had run out. Charles wrote that his generator hardly had enough fuel for a few hours of electricity at night. In his despatches, Charles noted the first evidence of apathy and discontent among the Portuguese officials. The fact that he knew this reflected the confidence and respect that Governor Ruas and his staff had in him. Charles wrote: *'From general conversation with various new officials I am of the opinion that most of them are not very keen on their appointments in Timor mainly on account of lack of personal facilities, climatic conditions and general rehabilitation difficulties.'*

Governor Ruas told Charles in confidence that he had difficulties with a new budget and *'must do practically all the work himself'* due to incompetent staff. Charles noted, *'His Excellency was suffering from overwork, overstrain and worry.'* Ruas pressed him to go to Darwin on behalf of his administration to negotiate details of the reconstruction of Timor. Charles was reluctant to go as it was outside the ambit of his responsibilities, but when pressured by the governor he agreed to cable Canberra for permission to do so. His request was refused.

Director of Portuguese Timor Air Services, Lieutenant Solano d'Almeida, and the Secretary of Cabinet, Ruy Cinatti, made many informal calls on the Eatons. Perhaps they just wanted to practise their English or join with Charles in his six o'clock sundowners. Charles became an insider to the internal intrigues and manipulations of Portuguese colonial politics. He wrote to Canberra:

*Senor Solano [d'Almeida] often asks for some particular advice from me regarding air matters generally. Senor Solano informed me in general conversation, but confidentially, that it is probable that His Excellency may again pay a visit to Lisbon; he did not indicate the reasons for the visit but personally I feel the visit would probably be connected with the finances of Timor. Until just recently, in fact until money was available from the collection of taxes from the natives, civil officials had not been paid their salaries for about six weeks.*



Later, in March 1947, Governor Ruas confided in Charles how disappointed and frustrated he was in the progress of the post-war rehabilitation of Timor. Charles wrote of Ruas that '*difficulties beset him on all sides*' including the non-arrival of essential materials from Portugal. Charles considered Ruas a conscientious man who took his responsibilities seriously but who was '*very tired*'. Shipping from Portugal was irregular, at times once in every eight months, and in April the colony ran out of both flour and sugar. Used to acting on his own initiative, Charles was astounded to find the governor had to refer trivial matters to Lisbon, such as approval for the right air routes to mail the post. He commented that local officials were '*timorous*' towards their metropolitan government. At one stage, when export coffee was to be shipped on a visiting ship, the *Comet*, Charles found '*the Portuguese Authorities were not capable at such short notice of arranging to load the coffee*' so he organised it himself.

In November 1946, the consul went on another inspection tour, accompanied by Bea and driver Ernesto. They visited the *postos* of Lautem, Lospalos and Cape Lore, about which he reported that the civil administration in the *postos* was still unsettled and confused. Many of the officials were new to Timor, not happy with conditions and wished to be sent back to either Portugal or Africa. The Eatons stayed with the *chefe de posto* of Los Palos; although kind and hospitable towards the couple, Charles found his manner of dealing with the Timorese '*most severe ... he drives them considerably and without doubt the natives of the district are frightened of him*'. The secretary of the *posto* complained to Charles about his superior's methods, confirming the consul's own assessment. The secretary continued to question the '*proposed plans of the Governor who, he considers, is only a talker and dreamer*'. He told Charles that he wanted to return to Portugal at the first opportunity and was prepared to pay his own way. Similar attitudes were later confirmed by Consul Dunn, who wrote that appointments to Timor were considered '*a kind of penance*'.

It was in Los Palos that Charles found the first indications of Timorese unrest. Although there had been initial enthusiasm among the native Timorese for the return to Portuguese rule after the Japanese, this attitude was waning. The imposition of a head tax of 16 patacas per year caused ‘*shock and grumblings*’, but Charles found no evidence of organised opposition.

The visit to Los Palos enabled Charles to show Bea the damage caused to the Japanese radar installations by his 79 Wing two years previously:

*During my last visit to the interior I was particularly interested to see the Japanese defences of Lautem-Cape Lore areas. I do not know if the full facts are known to our military authorities but at one time some 25,000 Japanese soldiers occupied these areas. The Japanese camps and defence works along the road between Lautem and Fuilore were considerable and the camouflage almost perfect. The Cape Lore beach-head was the best defence work I have seen in Timor; the earth and wire works were extensive.*

*I also visited the Japanese Cape Lore radar station. This station is actually on the top of a mountain at the rear of Cape Lore. I was very interested in this station as I personally took part in an attack on this work in December 1944. The attack was an interesting one as it was the first time that diaphragm bomb-heads were used in Timor. The Radar Station had been hit but the extent of the bomb damage was difficult to ascertain as after the attack the Japanese dismantled the remains. Without doubt the main building was severely damaged by the diaphragm bombs.*

Travelling in Timor was not without its dangers. In January 1947, the Eatons had a real scare when travelling back to Dili after visiting the western districts. While crossing the Comoro River, a sudden surge of monsoonal water stranded their jeep mid-stream. Within seconds Bea was sucked out of the car and began floating downstream. Ernesto and

Charles quickly jumped into the turbulent waters and managed to drag her to the river bank. Meanwhile, Charles Stuart, who was on school holidays, ran a few miles back to the nearest village to obtain help. Eventually the jeep was retrieved. While Charles and Ernesto extracted water from the engine, Bea and Charles Stuart were taken to the village where they spent the night as welcome guests of hospitable Timorese villagers.

The Eatons enjoyed their time in Timor, which reminded them of their India days. Charles, who had begun collecting orchids in Orissa's jungles, particularly relished his tours to the interior of Timor, where he collected many other orchid varieties. The consulate was soon festooned with ex-Japanese Army rice containers displaying a wide selection of the island's orchids.



**East Timor's oil industry in its infancy. Hand-ladling oil, Pualaca village, November 1946**

## Oil on Troubled Waters, 1947

*Communications here are the great difficulty. Since our arrival, we have had practically no supplies and no mail has been received since 23 November 1946. The Catalina service is not good and I feel there is certain apathy to do it from Service Circles at Darwin. The visit of Civil Aviation authorities which I really did want to come off has also been postponed.*<sup>5</sup>

While in Timor, Charles became closely involved with the nation's development, in particular the nation's oil reserves, the opening of the country to air travel and incipient political agitation. Immediately before WWII, Japan and Australia had vied for oil concessions in Timor; various companies including Timor Oil and Oil Search had negotiated for leases. The Japanese occupation of the island halted all exploration, but after the Australian Consulate opened in 1946, companies visited Timor to reactivate lapsed leases and search for new areas.

In July 1946 Charles inspected Laclubar district, 4000 feet (1220 metres) in altitude, and was impressed with its temperate climate, fertile soils and the condition of its livestock. He learnt that oil at the village of Pualaca was being 'ladled out of the well by hand' at a rate of 400 gallons (1515 litres) a month. After a four-hour journey on horseback to Pualaca he found that the oil fields consisted of three wells just 30 feet deep. The Japanese had constructed a crude refinery that was still operating. After being refined, the oil was poured by hand into 45-gallon barrels that were carried on poles by a team of 20 Timorese to Laclubar, 10 miles (16 kilometres) away—a full day's journey.

Charles extracted oil samples and photographed the oil fields, mailing both photographs and samples to Canberra after his return journey to Dili, during which he was kicked in the leg by a pony and laid low for some time. Eventually, production at Paulaca increased to

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<sup>5</sup> C Eaton, 1946.

5500 gallons (25,000 litres) of 'kerosene' a month, destined for the local market and retailing at 40 cents a litre or 3/4d Australian a gallon.

The subject of oil concessions occupied much of Charles' time in early 1947; in May, he inspected Timor Oil's assets at Aliambata, but dismissed their infrastructure as '*junk.*' He thought the oil wells in Suai were the most encouraging. A European geologist suggested to Charles that substantial oil fields would be discovered offshore. Charles found out that American companies were to be allocated oil concessions by the Portuguese authorities west of 125° 50' and Portuguese companies to the east of this longitude.

Charles suggested to Governor Ruas that he could arrange for the RAAF to conduct an aerial survey in June and August, when the least cloud is present over the islands. Charles wrote in one despatch: '*It seems to me that the position (of oil concessions) is both obscure here and at Lisbon.*' Unfortunately, the survey did not eventuate.



**The Governor of Portuguese Timor's visit to Australia 1947. From left, Consul Charles Eaton, Guinea Airways Air Hostess, Senhora Ruas, Captain Oscar Ruas and Senor Ruy Cinatti**

Charles arranged for Governor Ruas and himself to visit Australia to ‘*particularly help in the matter of the intricacies of Timor oil*’. The Governor and Senhora Ruas were guests of Australia’s Governor-General for three days, entertained by Dr Evatt at a state reception then taken to inspect the Newcastle steel works. During his visit, from 10 June to 5 July, Governor Ruas also discussed with officials and private interests the need for increased commerce between Timor and Australia. The Portuguese media reported:

*In Melbourne, Adelaide, Darwin and other cities the Governor of Timor was the centre of highest respect on part of the Australian authorities, who see in Timor a reborn colony and in Portugal, a friend and ally whom Australia can count upon.*

Charles’ concern about the need for better communications between Timor and Darwin had featured in despatches from early 1946 and led to a twice weekly RAAF Catalina flying-boat service. Charles regularly reported on airport matters in his despatches; for example, he noted that in the absence of any mechanical aids, many thousands of Timorese were preparing the Baucau Airport runways by hand. Charles relished his role as the unofficial advisor for Timor’s civil aviation. He advised on improvement to the airstrips at Dili and Lautem, adamant they be improved to Australian standards for safety reasons. Lautem aerodrome was still damaged from WWII bombing but Charles commented that ‘*except for a few bomb craters, which were flagged, it is suitable for landings*’. He facilitated the visits of two young Portuguese pilots to Australia to procure light aircraft and, when in Australia, personally approached the RAAF’s Chief of Air Staff and Director of Aviation to ensure Baucau airport was equipped with the best technology available. He also recommended that, for safety and convenience, a radio transmitting station be installed near Dili to enable direct communication with Darwin.



**Darwin-Dili RAAF Catalina service Dili Airport, 1947**

Unfortunately, the RAAF Catalina service proved unreliable; Charles was annoyed that his workmen therefore did not receive their promised beer ration. In July 1946 he finally admitted the Catalina service had been a failure; it had arrived on schedule on only three occasions. He recommended that a commercial aircraft company take over responsibility and invited Australian aviation administrators to Dili to assess the situation. After months of promises, no Australian aviation experts appeared. Charles fumed; he wrote to Canberra on a wide agenda of aviation issues and voiced his disappointment: *‘I am particularly sorry that the visit of the Australian Aviation officers has not taken place as I consider there are many matters regarding aviation and technical information that are keenly desired by the Portuguese authorities.’*

By 15 January 1947 no Catalina had arrived since late November, despite a message stating that *‘a Catalina might arrive in the New Year with Civil Aviation Officials’*. Charles blasted the RAAF: *‘The position is still obscure ... I am of the opinion that the service is not favoured by the RAAF,’* adding that the Darwin–Timor service should be operated by a civilian company. Finally, after a two-month lapse of the service, an Australian aviation delegation arrived on 24 January 1947. The

visitors were wined and dined by the Portuguese and shown Baucau and Lautem aerodromes, but left early the next morning. Charles wrote to Canberra that the Australian party had failed to meet its objective. Everyone, including Governor Ruas, was disappointed. Charles was furious as the RAAF ‘*could not give any definite indications regarding the future of the Catalina service*’.

At the same time, political tensions were increasing. Timorese from both sides of the border clashed in February 1947; one Portuguese African soldier was killed and five West Timorese were wounded. Charles reported that Javanese nationalists probably influenced the West Timorese to incite such incidents for political purposes. A month later, a Portuguese patrol crossed into Dutch territory in mufti. A rifle fight with Dutch troops eventuated and, although no one was killed, there were wounded on both sides and one Portuguese African soldier was captured by the Dutch. The motive for the patrol was thought to be revenge for the death of an African soldier the month before. This second clash resulted in intense ill feeling on both sides. Although some border incidents were a result of cattle stealing and intertribal animosities, Charles warned: ‘*Such infiltration, however, underlines the need for interest by Australia in this island.*’



**Portuguese African soldiers on duty, November 1946**



Charles also kept busy touring Timor as much as practical. He departed on an extended tour of the *fronteira postos* that bordered Dutch Timor: Ermera, Fatu-Bessi, Hatolia, Lete-Foho, Bobonaro and Suai. He was informed there were ‘*a few minor frontier incidents*’. Governor Ruas, however, confided in Charles his concern that Indonesian political agitation could filter into Portuguese territory from the Dutch side.

Charles reported to Canberra:

*The Fronteira Province seems to be causing the Government little concern. This was the Province where most collaboration with the Japanese occurred, and according to the Portuguese, was caused by infiltration from Dutch Timor. Two companies of West African soldiers have been sent to the Fronteira Province with their Headquarters at Bobonaro. The village of Lete-Foho has been completely destroyed during the war but, in this case, it is admitted that the village was destroyed by hostile Timorese. Practically all main buildings in all townships visited had been destroyed during the war.*

On this tour, Charles witnessed first-hand the reluctance by the Timorese to pay their head-tax. He estimated half the Timorese in the *fronteira* districts were refusing to pay and many had ‘*gone bush*’ to avoid payment. He said many of the border’s population had cooperated with the Japanese during WWII, especially around Hatolia. This was the only occasion he saw the *chefe de posto*’s home guarded at nights. Hatolia was the target of 79 Wing’s successful rocket attack in November 1944 and where Charles’ Beaufighter returned to base with a piece of rocket embedded in one wing.

On one of his *fronteira* tours, Charles found that the rubber and coffee estates of the *Sociedade Agricola Patria e Trabalho* (SAPT) had begun rehabilitating their plantations. He again took the opportunity to push Australia’s interests in Timor:

*The SAPT plantations at Fatu-Besi consist of about 12,000 acres of probably the best country in Timor and as stated in previous dispatches were 40% owned by the Japanese prior to the last war. Attached to my dispatch No 8 dated 13 August, 1946 was an annex of a decree of the Portuguese Authorities and in paragraph 42 of this decree it stated that all Japanese interests in Timor were to be confiscated and taken over by the Portuguese Government. In view of the efforts of our own country during the war towards the defeat of Japan generally and the Japanese occupation of Timor in particular, I think consideration may be worthwhile for Australia to take over the previous Japanese interest in the SAPT and thus give Australia a permanent [and] practical interest in Timor. However, I realise this matter is a very delicate one in view of the present Portuguese outlook on their colonies.*

He described an incursion into the Portuguese enclave of Oecussi by escaped Japanese prisoners-of-war and Javanese nationalists who asked Portuguese African soldiers for their machine guns. Heavily armed soldiers were immediately flown into Oecussi but the intruders returned to Dutch territory without incident. Not only was Charles concerned with Portuguese Timor affairs, he was also charged by Canberra to investigate the situation in Dutch-controlled Timor. Canberra viewed the Indonesian nationalist intrusion into the eastern islands of Indonesia to be of the greatest importance and in need of close monitoring.

Charles visited Kupang in Dutch Timor in May and July of 1947. He reported to Canberra that there was confusion as Dutch Timor was now part of the new Dutch-sponsored 'State of East Indonesia', with its capital in Macassar. The Dutch Resident had to report not only to local councils headed by traditional rulers, but to Lieutenant Governor-General van Mook in Batavia. Charles continued: '*The administration [of Dutch Timor] is in a state of flux and the administration of other islands is being handed over to the local councils. The Resident told me he was in a most unenviable position. There is no actual outward*

*political trouble in Timor itself but I was told that political trouble has extended to Sumbawa.'*

Charles tried to explore if the Dutch would lease part of their territory to Australia. Dr Steven Farram wrote in 2010 that Charles had '*noted the importance of the territory to Australia for defence purposes and its potential economic capabilities*'. He had, in fact, suggested that the Dutch were likely to relinquish their Timor holdings in the future as the gradual shift to local Indonesian administration had left most Dutch officials with little desire to remain in the territory. Charles was later proved correct. His personal view was that the whole island should be an interim protectorate of Australia '*for the protection of the Timorese people and the defence of Australia*'.

During these visits Charles took the opportunity to inspect some of the damage inflicted by 76 Wing during WWII; of particular interest were the dock areas of Kupang and the Japanese barracks nearby. Charles drove to the Mina River and visited the bridge to the north-east of Kupang that Beaufighters and Mitchell bombers of 79 Wing had destroyed.

In late August Charles was suddenly transferred to Batavia as the Consul-General to the Netherlands East Indies (NEI). He summarised his prime responsibilities while in Dili: '*Reported on the political and economic development of the territory with emphasis on the 'Australian Defence Policy' for the area immediately north of Darwin. Liaison with all local and foreign officials, private business people and trade enquiries from all sources.*'

Six weeks after Charles' departure, Secretary Cinetti wrote to Canberra on the Governor's behalf thanking Australia for the attention Portuguese Timor had received since the war. He concluded: '*Concerning Mr Charles Eaton, if on one hand His Excellency the Governor received with great satisfaction his promotion to Consul*

*General, on the other hand it is with sadness that he sees him leaving Timor, where he has only friends.*<sup>6</sup>

The Portuguese Government offered to award Charles the decoration, Commander in the Military Order of the Cross of Christ, *‘in recognition of his useful co-operation in securing all necessary facilities in connection with reconstruction and development of Timor’*. The Australian Government declined permission for him to accept the decoration. Nevertheless, Charles must have been gratified to be formally recognised for his contribution to the territory’s post-war reconstruction in addition to an order of chivalry from The Netherlands, a citation from George VI for his participation in Timor’s liberation, and acknowledgement by the Japanese Commander in Timor that the attacks he directed *‘were so skilful and heavy’*.

### **Postscript**

Charles’ vision of industrial-scale onshore oil production has yet to be realised in Timor-Leste, the independent state that Portuguese Timor finally transitioned into on 20 May 2002 after a failed decolonisation process and a civil war. The Timor Sea has since yielded billions of dollars’ worth of gas that has contributed to the buoyancy of the modern Timor-Leste economy and caused friction between Timor-Leste and Australia concerning which state should receive the lion’s share of royalties. The transmitting station that Charles recommended be built in 1946, which became known as the Marconi Building, played a critical role in the 1975 civil war prior to the Indonesian intervention.

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*Charles Stuart Eaton has had a lifetime career in agricultural development and has been a project manager with private-sector agribusiness in Fiji, China, Indonesia and Turkey, as well as a*

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<sup>6</sup> R Cinetti, 1947.

*consultant in numerous other countries. Charles obtained his PhD from the University of Western Australia in 1998, at the age of 64.*