

ABC TV Landline
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Reporter Prue Adams

ANNE KRUGER, PRESENTER: This weekend marks the 70th anniversary of one of Australia's worst peacetime air crashes. In October 1938, the Kyeema smashed into the side of Mount Dandenong in Victoria, killing all 18 people on board, including a man many touted as future Prime Minister, Charles Hawker.

A university scholarship was established in his memory and although it's the most generous of its type in the country, surprisingly few students know it exists.

MALE VOICEOVER: It is 11:15am on Sunday, October the 25th, 1938. The weather is clear as the Australian National Airlines Douglas DC2 Kyeema is preparing to fly out of Adelaide and head to Melbourne's Essendon Airport. At 1:45pm, Kyeema crashes suddenly, little or no warning, into the western slopes at the top of Mount Dandenong. There was a federal Minister, three wine industry leaders, a couple on their honeymoon, and prominent members of the legal fraternity including a King's Counsel and a crew of four. All 18 aboard die instantly upon impact.

PRUE ADAMS, REPORTER: While the crash of the Kyeema seems to have slipped into the black hole of history, in its day it was big news and the fallout was far reaching. It prompted a Royal Commission, and changed the face of civil aviation in Australia, and it was widely believed that the accident robbed the country of a future Prime Minister.

DR JOHN BANNON, POLITICAL HISTORIAN: I don't think it's stretching it too far, about the only conservative figure in Australia in that time who could have successfully managed a Coalition Government and whom John Curtin and his Labor people would have been prepared to work with was Hawker.

PRUE ADAMS: Charles Hawker was born here in Bungaree Station in South Australia's mid north in 1894. His family had taken up land in this region when the colony of South Australia was scarcely five years old, and the name Hawker is well-known in these parts. There's a township of Hawker not far from here, there's an electorate of Hawker, and then there's the Hawker Scholarship.

From all accounts, Charles Allan Seymour Hawker was an extraordinary character. Born into a family that had made its mark and money in the wool industry and in politics, he showed the same leanings from a young age. He was sent to the prestigious Geelong Grammar before studying at Cambridge University.

Then, World War I broke out. Hawker enlisted in the British Army and served on the Western Front, but within months was injured and lost an eye. He convalesced for a time, and then, against medical advice, went back to

war. This time when wounded, he was paralysed from the waist down and he returned to his Australian home, Bungaree Station, to recover.

He always limped and had limited eyesight. It didn't stop him though from going back into the wool industry, and running for Federal Parliament, becoming the Liberal member for Wakefield. In this wonderful old footage from 1932, Charles Hawker is introduced into Prime Minister Joseph Lyons's Cabinet.

(Excerpt from footage)

JOSEPH LYONS, FORMER PRIME MINISTER: Mr Hawker, Minister for Markets and Minister for Repatriation.

(End of excerpt)

PRUE ADAMS: Six years later, CAS Hawker was killed in the plane crash while he was en route to a cabinet meeting in Canberra. It is, as former South Australian Labor Premier and now political historian Dr John Bannon says, a story of unfulfilled potential.

DR JOHN BANNON: His life was cut short at that critical time. If he'd lived another 10 years he'd be a household name, I suspect, but, of course, we don't know.

PRUE ADAMS: Hawker died unmarried and without children. So his devastated younger sister came up with a plan to have him remembered.

ANDREW HAWKER, HAWKER SCHOLARSHIP TRUSTEE: Well, the late Mrs Needham, who was Charles Hawker's sister, decided quite early on after he died, that having two children of her own, she wished to perpetuate his memory in a worthwhile and living manner, and so she set money aside for the trust, after she died, that would provide for education and give students a chance to get the benefit of a university education, living in a residential college, and being able to network and enjoy life as much as her brother had.

MALE SPEAKER: The CAS Hawker Scholarship is the most financially generous, privately funded scholarship available to Year 12 undergraduate and postgraduate students in Australia. It perpetuates the memory of a scholar, a soldier, a pastoralist and a statesman - Charles Allan Seymour Hawker.

PRUE ADAMS: Since 1991, more than \$4.5 million has been awarded to scores of students wanting to live in while studying at a select group of Australian universities, or at Cambridge in England. The individual scholarship is worth up to \$60,000. This year, the 70th anniversary of Hawker's death, the official presentation of 10 scholarships was held at Bungaree Station.

ANDREW HAWKER: I'm totally in awe of many of them to see how much they've done, and often you sit and read them and think, "This can't be true", when you meet them and speak to them you go, "Wow, this is true", and it's an unbelievable experience just to meet some of them.

PRUE ADAMS: This year, more than half the scholars hailed from the bush. Wallace Dunsdon grew up on the family property in Cunnamulla in south west Queensland, and is studying farm business management at Marcus Oldham College in Geelong.

And when you were told that you were one of the recipients, what was your reaction?

WALLACE DUNSDON, 2008 HAWKER SCHOLAR: Ah, stoked. I wanted to be modest about it but at the same time, I was punching the air, I was quite happy, I definitely knew it was a big thing, it's a massive scholarship to win and you have a look at the likes of the students that are also recipients, and to be compared or be in that league, you've got to pinch yourself and just make sure you're still awake, so I'm really thrilled with that.

PRUE ADAMS: Veranda Tiara was born Bhopal in India, and her irrigation expert father moved the family to Griffith in New South Wales when she was three years old. Like all the other scholars, she has fit more into her 19 years than most of us do in a lifetime. She's been on a cultural exchange to South Africa, raised money for breast cancer research and competed in the national rowing championships.

VRINDA TIWARI, 2008 HAWKER SCHOLAR: Well you know what, I think the key is actually just time management. I did a lot of rowing, and you know getting up at 4:30 in the morning and having two training sessions a day really teaches you to manage your time, so I think I set short-term goals, I set long-term goals and try and sort out what I want to do, and the steps I have to take to do those, and you know, writing up a timetable, it sounds really silly but it actually just helps fitting everything in, just like I can get the most out of my 24 hour day.

PRUE ADAMS: In 19 years, how have you actually achieved everything you have? Do you sleep?

VITHIYASAGAR SRITHARAN, 2008 HAWKER SCHOLAR: Really when you're doing it, it's great fun, it's great fun to be involved in school life and the community life.

PRUE ADAMS: Vithiyasagar Sritharan comes originally from Sri Lanka, but when he was born in 1989, it was a country wracked by civil war. His family moved to Dubbo in New South Wales. Last year, this high achiever was elected captain of Dubbo College Senior Campus, he's now studying economics at Australian National University, and would love to work in the Federal Treasury one day. While a highlight was door stopping Peter Costello, he often refers to a quote from another well known politician.

VITHIYASAGAR SRITHARAN: It's Winston Churchill who said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give". And that sort of theme was bestowed upon me in my upbringing, my parents really wanted me to give back to society because of the opportunities that Australian society has given us.

PRUE ADAMS: If Charles Hawker has been forgotten by the wider community, in the shed where he had once shorn and crutched his own flock, he is always remember as nothing less than a hero.

ANDREW HAWKER: As my mother told me and my father told me, all our forebears came here with nothing but a good education and good heart.

PRUE ADAMS: While scholars past and present enjoy the hospitality at Bungaree Station, you'd think that this richest of university handouts would have uni kids queuing up. Not so, says Andrew Hawker.

ANDREW HAWKER: It's been very hard and frustrating particularly in the beginning to understand what was on offer, to understand that we were trying to get as many people as we could, particularly from regional and rural Australia to apply and to try and live the sort of life that Charles Hawker had, or the same opportunities that Charles Hawker had, so they could go on and serve their country and serve their fellow land.

DR JOHN BANNON: The great thing about the Hawker scholarships is that they are directed to college residential living. Many people believe that this is the last vestige of the great undergraduate experience. There are so many other pressures in and around universities these days that the support of a college environment is something very special.

PRUE ADAMS: The Church of St Michael was built by Charles Hawker's grandfather, George, back in 1864. It's one of several stone structures still standing at Bugaree Station. This is a region which remains rich wool country, to a great degree because of the merino line the Hawker family started so many generations ago, and the place where the little-known soldier, pastoralist and parliamentarian was born is also the place where he was buried, just 44 years later.

DR JOHN BANNON: It is a great pity that having survived as he had, he was an amazing survivor, he survived almost certain death in World War One, he survived almost crippling disability to take an active role in public life, and then to be so cruelly and tragically dead at the point in time when he was just about to come into this own, that's the sad story of Hawker, but his life was a tremendous inspiration.

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