The stories of those honored in the Dedication Plaques in Cumming Avenue

Francis "Frankie" John Hunt enlisted with the 6th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment (6RAR), as a Private (service number 39701) and served as a forward scout with the battalion in the Vietnam War.

I Was Only 19 (A Walk In The Light Green)

Mum and Dad and Denny saw the passing out parade at Puckapunyal
It was a long march from cadets
The Sixth Battalion was the next to tour,
and it was me who drew the card
We did Canungra and Shoalwater before we left

And Townsville lined the footpath as we marched down to the quay
This clipping from the paper shows us young and strong and clean
And there's me, in my slouch hat, with my SLR and greens
God help me
I was only nineteen

From Vung Tau riding Chinooks to the dust at Nui Dat
I'd been in and out of choppers now for months
And we made our tents a home: VB, and pinups on the lockers
And an Asian orange sunset through the scrub

And can you tell me, doctor, why I still can't get to sleep?
And night time's just a jungle dark and a barking M16?
And what's this rash that comes and goes?
Can you tell me what it means?
God help me
I was only nineteen

A four-week operation when each step can mean
your last one on two legs
It was a war within yourself
But you wouldn't let your mates down 'til they had you dusted off
So you closed your eyes and thought about somethin' else

And then someone yelled out "Contact!" and the bloke behind me swore
We hooked in there for hours, then a God-almighty roar
Frankie kicked a mine the day that mankind kicked the moon
God help me
He was going home in June

On 21 July 1969, he was on patrol with 3 Platoon, A Company, 6RAR, when Lieutenant Peter Hines stepped on a mine, which activated and killed the latter. The explosion injured several others, including Hunt, who was standing closest to Hines. Hunt was air-lifted to the military hospital in Vung Tau and then evacuated to Australia for further surgery at Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital to amputate his severely injured legs. He spent 19 months in rehabilitation.

In 1983, musician John Schuman wrote and released the song "I Was Only 19" which was performed by his band, Redgum. The song was based on experiences John heard from veterans, particularly Mick Storen (his brother in-law) and Frankie Hunt

The song is a first-person account of a typical Australian soldier's experience in the Vietnam War, from training at a military academy in Australia to exposure to military operations and combat, and ultimately his return home disillusioned and suffering from both PTSD and, it is implied, the effects of Agent Orange. The mine experiences in the story pertain to an incident during Operation Mundingburra on 21 July, 1969

The song was performed onstage in The Domain for the Welcome Home Concert. Organised by the Australian Vietnam Veterans Association, the Australian Vietnam Forces Welcome Home Parade and Concert were among several events held for Vietnam veterans that weekend.

While many units had marched through the streets on their return to Australia, many in the Vietnam veteran community felt Australian society did not respect or recognise their service. Addressing the RSL Conference in August 1987, Prime Minister Hawke noted: "I firmly believe that the October parade will be the culmination of a long process of reconciliation and community acceptance of its obligations to the veterans of Vietnam. I believe we must honestly acknowledge that our involvement in Vietnam did cause deep divisions in the Australian community. But whatever our individual views on the merits of Australian involvement, we must equally acknowledge the commitment, courage and integrity of our armed forces who served in Vietnam."

From this parade, a desire for a War Memorial to commemorate Vietnam Veterans grew into fruition with the Memorial's dedication in October 1992. Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial was constructed in Anzac Parade, Canberra in 1992 and includes a "Wall of Words":

This image is one of a series captured by Australian War Memorial photographers who travelled from Canberra to document the event.
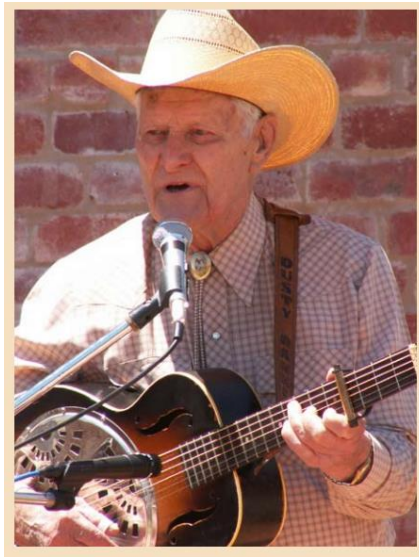
Music has been my life

Roger Hogan is a Birchip boy, born and bred, a man who likes his space, an outdoor man. Try to keep him indoors, or in the city, and you're in trouble. As a boy, try to persuade him that school was a worthwhile activity, and you were on a lost cause. But put a guitar in his hand, and the world lights up.

Born in 1924, Roger can remember when Birchip's population was 1300, when there were four grocery shops, two doctors, three hospitals, a power station, two picture theatres and 3MB Birchip, the Brighter Broadcasting Station. The power station, pumping electricity into the town, provided a steady boom boom background noise, so that when it broke down in the middle of the night, everyone woke up.

Roger likes to recount the history of his type of music. Its beginnings lie in America, when people were poor, made their own instruments and, charged up on home brew, sang their own brand of hillbilly music. Then the cowboys took it up and it became country and western. Now it's simply country. Roger parts company at country rock, which is often too noisy and lacking in the essential 'sound' he loves.

Bing Crosby, Gracie Fields were and are favourites: 'you can understand what they are singing and the melody and beat are familiar.'

Roger first mastered the guitar the age of nineteen, one of his tutors being films which featured close-ups of Gene Autry's hands playing. Though he never learned to read and write music, song writing has always come naturally. 'I hear the melody, and then the words come; they just bubble up, like a spring.' Often, a song is related to an experience or event in his life.

Roger's early show biz career was typical of its time: hard knocks in a tough, unsympathetic world. He was advised to adopt a stage name: Dusty Rankin would be able to open doors that Roger Hogan could not.

Perhaps the big break came in 1946 when Roger won the 2SM Amateur Hour which was broadcast Australia wide. This was followed by a tour of Tasmania the following year which really set things up for the budding C and w star. In 1948 he began recording and his career was on the way. By 1962, he was touring Australia, performing six nights a week, twelve months of the year, an exhausting but rewarding schedule which gave him the opportunity meet 'so many wonderful people in our wonderful country.'

But really, it was all too much. Roger was married, with two daughters, and he believed that the road was no life for a wife and family. It was time for Dusty Rankin to return home.

In 1963, Roger took a job at 'Windarra', the McClelland farm, where he remained for the next twenty nine and a half years. He did so on the understanding that he could maintain a singing career at the same time.

After he had been fencing for two years, Alan McClelland came to him with a proposition: "If I buy a tractor and plant, will you work it?' There was an additional carrot: "It'll have a radio, because I know you like music.'

Roger Lived in Birchip until his death on 22nd September 2015

Ray Neville and The remarkable story
of the 1948 Melbourne Cup winner

First published in *The Sunday Age* on November 3, 1996
Dream Ride

It's a scene straight from every kid-meets-horse tearjerker ever made, by 'National Velvet' from 'A Bush Christmas'. It goes like this...

The last stages of the 1948 Melbourne Cup*CREDIT:ADAM MCLEAN*

Cup day, 1948. A one-horse town called Birchip drowses in the Mallee heat. It's a day's journey by slow train and a world away from the morning suits and manicured lawns of Flemington. George Neville, battler, is leaning on the bar at the Commercial Hotel. Like most of Australia, he and his mates are listening to the races on "the wireless".

George is a racing man, a bow-legged bush jockey who went around once in a Caulfield Cup in the 1920s before coming home to Birchip. He feeds a couple of slow gallopers and 13 kids, and does the best he can. If Hollywood makes this picture, this is the Mickey Rooney part.

Cut to Flemington. The sun is shining, the champagne flowing, and it looks magnificent, but beneath the lush turf the track is soggy after days of rain. An obscure jumper called Finentigue has pinched the Cup Hurdle at 100/1. An omen, maybe, that it's a day for outsiders.

The race before the Cup is the Mimosa Stakes, for two-year-old fillies. Regal Gem, the great Bill Williamson aboard, knocks off the favourite, Luck Penny, ridden by another star jockey, Harold Badger. As usual, after listing the placegetters, the caller runs through the Cup field of 30 horses.

Mr. H. G. Raymond with Jockey Ray Neville, after their 1948 Melbourne Cup success with Rimfire.
CREDIT:FAIRFAX ARCHIVES

The interest is in the topweight, Howe, at 7/4 the hottest favourite since Phar Lap in 1930. Badger is on him, and the combination has pulled a crowd of 101,000.

The odds say Howe has the Cup in the bag, but as the caller ticks off the rest of the field, back in Birchip George Neville automatically listens. All the way through the card to number 25, an 80/1 shot. "Rimfire, R. Neville, seven stone two," the caller says.

George nearly drops his beer. "R. Neville" is his son, Ray - a tiny 15-year-old who's had nine race rides since getting his licence just two months earlier.

George bolts for home. On the way he calls in at the school, yelling to several of his offspring in the playground that their brother is riding in the Cup. The boldest of the Neville brood immediately wags school, heading to a cafe where there's a radio.

At home, George blurts the news to his wife. She's stunned. Why would anyone put a raw teenager on a Melbourne Cup horse? She grabs her purse.

Flashback to the previous year. Little Ray is working on farms - driving tractors, trapping rabbits, plucking wool from dead sheep - but he dreams of being a jockey, as his dad was and his older brother Max is. He gets his chance when an old local horseman recommends him to a respected Mordialloc trainer, Lou Robertson.

Ray, barely big enough to lug his suitcase, catches the train to the city. His mother doesn't want him to go, but there are too many mouths to feed at home.

The youngster has grown up around horses and competed in shows and unregistered race meetings, and starts riding work as soon as he gets to Robertson's stables. But he doesn't get his race permit until the following season, just two months before the Cup carnival.

By that time Robertson has polished the boy's style. His first race ride is in a field of 40, up the straight six at Flemington. Two hours later, he wins the last race of the day on a stayer called Lincoln.

Cut to Cup eve. Rimfire, a handsome six-year-old chestnut with legs as patchy as his form, is still sore after finishing behind Howe in the Hotham Handicap. A leading lightweight jockey, W.A. Smith, has the Cup ride, but tells Rimfire's trainer, Stan Boydon, he'd rather ride Sun Blast, also an outsider, but not so likely to break down.

With less than 24 hours to go, Rimfire's connections need another lightweight. Why they pick Neville is unclear. One story is that a stablehand suggests "the boy from Birchip" because of his win on Lincoln.

Boydon contacts the boy's master and books the ride. But the shrewd Robertson doesn't tell Neville until next morning, so that he sleeps soundly and doesn't have time to be nervous.

Cup morning. Neville is up before dawn and rides work as usual. As he comes off the track before breakfast, Robertson breaks the news. Hurry up and clean your gear, he says. You're on Rimfire in the Cup.

As soon as the trainer is out of earshot, the stable foreman scoffs at Neville, "If that bastard Rimfire wins, I'll walk from here to Sydney - barefoot."

Later, at Flemington, the public and the bookmakers share the foreman's opinion. No one wants to back Rimfire. He stays at 80-1.

Ray Neville brings Rimfire back to scale after winning the 1948 Melbourne Cup.CREDIT:FAIRFAX ARCHIVES

Neville gets to the course in the float that brings Robertson's horses, including a Cup runner, Westralian.

In the rooms, the older jockeys laugh when the kid puts on Rimfire's colors. The jacket is so big the sleeves have to be rolled up and pinned; the tail reaches his knees before he tucks it into his breeches.

Neville borrows a lead bag from Smith, the rider who has turned down the Rimfire ride. Smith says, "He'll be a good ride for you."

The youngster asks innocently, "Has he got a chance?" and Smith laughs. "No, but he'll give you good experience." He's right.

In the mounting yard, Rimfire looks good - for a crock that has tottered off the track on three legs at his most recent win, months earlier, and pulled up sore after the Hotham Handicap three days before. His trainer has been putting cold compresses on the horse's front fetlock joints until late the night before, hoping the VRC veterinary surgeon will let the horse run.

The sight of the baby-faced lad perched on Rimfire hardly inspires confidence in a field that includes horses such as Comic Court and Carbon Copy, and some of the world's best jockeys: Williamson and Badger, Cook and Hutchinson, Thompson and Moore.

From barrier 23, the boy from the bush eases the handsome crock across well behind the leaders, to be almost mid-field passing the stands the first time. Rimfire gradually improves his position, Neville sitting quietly as a bolter called Royal Scot hares along in front. At the turn, as the leaders tire, Rimfire moves up to seventh place. Photographers stationed there snap the youngster still sitting tight.

Then it happens. Rimfire forgets he is a cripple looking for a place to break down, and sweeps to the front . . . just as the favourite, Howe, falters in his run with an injured ligament.

If it were a film, this is the moment when the audience starts cheering the underdog. In the real world of the racecourse, the punters aren't so generous when longshots beat favorites.
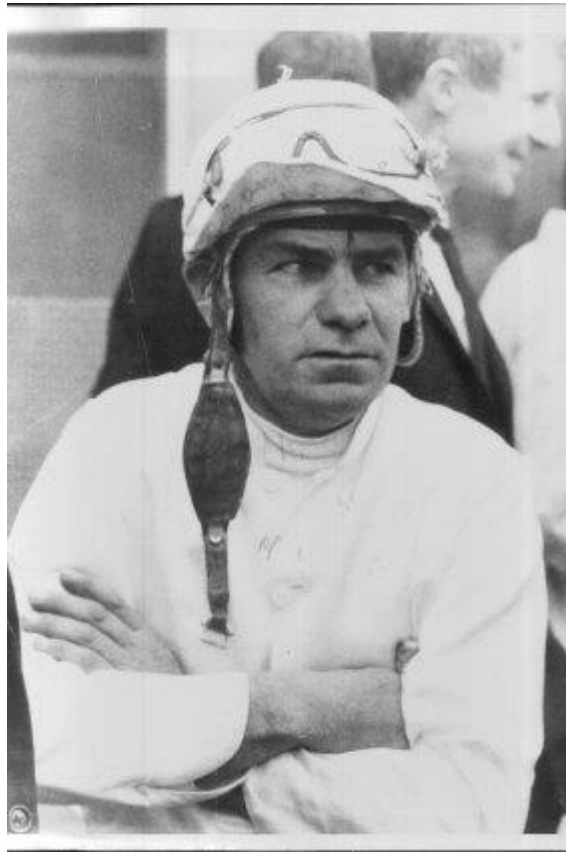
Ray Neville in 1967.*CREDIT:FAIRFAX ARCHIVES*

Rimfire hits the front as Howe flounders. But the script calls for a tight finish. The Sydney Cup winner Dark Marne, ridden by the top Sydney jockey Jack Thompson, sets out after Rimfire. Thompson pulls the whip and lifts his horse closer with every stride. They hit the line locked together.

Afterwards, the boy tells reporters: "I was so excited halfway down the straight at the thought of winning the Melbourne Cup that I hardly realised Dark Marne was so close."

The taciturn Thompson thinks he's won. So certain is he that he wheels his horse around first and trots back in front, and tells waiting reporters he's got the money.

One of the other senior riders calls to Neville: "Do you reckon you got there, son?"

"Well, I hope I did," the boy replies doubtfully. A sea of punters hope he's wrong.

He rides back to scale, as one reporter writes, "in a hush almost unparalleled in racing."

FOR the first time in Cup history, the judge calls for a photograph from the new finish camera. It shows that Rimfire has won by a nostril. Angry punters boo the judge. Thompson, who is to ride for another 35 years, swears to the day he dies that the camera was faulty, and that Dark Marne won.

Meanwhile, in Birchip, Neville's parents run to the hotel in time to hear the race. His mother has "a quid" each way with the SP bookmaker in the bar.

One of the Neville brothers sneaks back to school after the race, and is caught by the teacher, who produces a strap. Luckily, he asks what won the Cup. When the boy says "Me brother did, sir," the teacher lets him off - and declares a half holiday for the whole school. It's a big day in Birchip.

Ray Neville takes the last jump to win the Broadmeadows Steeplechase at Moonee Valley in 1966.CREDIT:ALAN LAMBERT

Late that afternoon, the boy jockey goes back to Mordialloc in the horse float, clutching "25 quid" Rimfire's owner has given him. He gets an extra-large serve of steak and eggs to celebrate, and is allowed go to Wirth's Circus to be presented with a trophy whip.

Next day is his 16th birthday. He's up at 4 am to ride work and muck out stables. The fairy story's over. Fade to black.

The boy from Birchip turns 64 today. Exactly 48 years after he piloted Rimfire into Melbourne Cup folklore, it's hard to tell whether he's tired of recalling his brush with the big time, or just modest. Both, probably.

It's true that the chapter of Ray Neville's life that reads like a film script closed on that golden afternoon in 1948. But, in his own way, he's lived happily ever after.

Which is not to say he went on to a glorious career in the saddle. Neither did he vanish from racing without riding another winner.

The truth is somewhere in between, and not especially romantic. Like many apprentices, Neville got heavy. He won a few more races, but within 18 months of his Cup win he couldn't make the tiny weights he needed to ride in claiming races.

Too big to be an apprentice jockey, he became a small apprentice carpenter. Not as dashing a trade, but more reliable. At first, he worked in Melbourne, but he soon went home to the bush. And he stayed there.

But he didn't stay out of the saddle.

As a schoolboy, Neville loved riding over jumps at local shows. He'd listened to the stories of the old "jumping men" his father knew. It wasn't long before the only carpenter ever to win a Melbourne Cup decided to dust off his childhood ambitions and try to add the Grand National steeplechase to his record.

It happened like this. He'd been doing riding work at Birchip, and taking the occasional flat ride at country meetings. One day an old jumping trainer, Reuben Fisher, asked him if he wanted to ride in a hurdle race.

Ray Neville in 1992*CREDIT:BRUCE POSTLE*

"Yeah," Neville replied.

"Ever done it before?"

"No," said Neville.

"Well, you're the right man for the job," said the old timer drily. "Because the horse has never been over jumps either."

The horse was from Ouyen. The race was on a dirt track at Kaniva. He ran second, and Neville was hooked.

For nearly 20 years he built houses Monday to Friday, riding work and schooling jumpers before he started, and on Saturdays he rode in races - against legendary jumps jockeys such as Ted Byrne and Tom McGinley - for "three quid" a losing ride, more for the occasional winner. It helped feed the kids: he had eight of them.

His biggest win was the Commonwealth Steeplechase. He didn't win a National, the closest he came to winning Warrnambool's famous Grand Annual was fourth, and he ran places in the Hiskens Steeple several times. But he won plenty of other races, including a few for Sir Henry Bolte. "I never kept records," he says.

Rimfire ridden by Ray Neville, outside, wins the 1948 Melbourne Cup.*CREDIT:FAIRFAX ARCHIVES*

He was stable jockey for a Mallee trainer, Reg Fisher. When Fisher moved from Rainbow to Stawell in 1966, the Nevilles went with him. They've been there ever since.

Neville's second racing career ended in a steeplechase at Ballarat in 1969, when his horse fell and crushed him.

"I woke up next morning in St John's Hospital with one arm in plaster and one leg in plaster and said, 'That's it. I've given it way.' I came right six months later, but I couldn't go back on my word." As soon as he was fit enough, he started riding work again. He kept it up until he turned 60.

Ray Neville died, aged 76. Ray passed away in the Stawell Hospital after a short battle with cancer, just over a month after a civic reception to honour the 60th anniversary of his Melbourne Cup winning ride aboard Rimfire