Major John Charles Xavier (Chas.) McKenna (XC 1899)

From “The Xaverian” 1917 p. 69/70

Major Charles McKenna. — “On April 25th, in France, from double pneumonia, Major Charles McKenna.” Such was the death notice that brought sorrow, both to this and the other side of the world. To this, where the family, an old Castlemaine one, was well-known and respected; and to the other, where, first as a journalist on the “Daily Mirror,” and later as a soldier who won his Lieutenancy in the Bechuanaland Rifles during the Boer War.

Standing 6 feet 4 inches, he was one of the tallest men in the Army, and one of the sights of London was to see the well-proportioned giant - popularly known as “Long Mac.” or “Big McKenna”- pass by in uniform.

On the outbreak of the present war, he gave up journalism, and once more took to soldiering, only to fight hard on the field and then finally capitulate to one whose knocking knows no refusing answer.

May he, great-hearted soldier and great-hearted man as he was, rest in peace. Our sincerest sympathy to his wife and child (both resident in England), as also to those dear to him here in Australia.

The Commemorative Roll records the names of those Australians who died during or as a result of wars in which Australians served, but who were not serving in the Australian Armed Forces and therefore not eligible for inclusion on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial.

**Commemorative Roll**

**John Charles Xavier McKenna**

Rank: Major

Unit: 9th Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment

Service: British Army

Date of death: 20 April 1917

Place of death: France

Cause of death: Illness

Age at death: 44

Cemetery details: Avesnes-le-Comte Communal Cemetery Extension, Avesnes-le-Comte, Arras, France

Grave Reference: Plot IV, Row C, Grave No. 12

The village of Avesnes-le-Comte was for some time the VI Corps headquarters. The 37th and 30th Casualty Clearing Stations were there from April 1916, the 42nd in June 1916, and the 41st in January 1917.

*The communal cemetery contains 2 Commonwealth burials of the First World War, both made in April 1916.*
J. C. McKenna wrote us from London under date 12/12/'13, and as the “Standard” circulates among a different set of readers, we run no risk to our own circulation in printing this delightful epistle in full:

"The Standard,"
Shoe Lane, Fleet Street,
London, E.C.

Editor, the "Xaverian."

Dear Sir,—At intervals I receive letters from various co-workers of yours inviting me to send paragraphs about myself to your publication. During my six years in London I have written many paragraphs about all sorts of people, chiefly concerning kings and emperors, and little children who have dropped father’s last half-penny down the grating. The British public like extremes; it must be either the most pompous pom or the most penurious penny. Having skilled myself in such superlatives, I find it impossible to write anything about such an ordinary, average, everyday, medium middle-class sort of person as myself. Besides, I am like the little boy at the party who, on being asked by the Vicar to have some more jam, refused, saying that he came from the place where it was made.

There is, however, one point I should like to make clear to old Xaverians who write to me, and that is that "McKenna, London," is not yet sufficient address for a letter to find me. Despite the fact that I stand 6ft 5in., and that I am an old Xaverian, and that I frequently wear a red and black tie, and that my trunks and bags have got red and black stripes painted them (red and black fortunately being also the colours of my old regiment), despite these colossal advantages in life, I am still overshadowed by another McKenna—the Right Hon. Reginald, His Majesty’s Secretary of State for the Home Department (salary £5000 per annum) who gets first peep at all letters addressed: "McKenna, London," and no doubt, when he reads one which commences: "Dear Legs. You miserable blighter! Why don’t you send some more skite about yourself to the old Xaverian magazine—you long-legged gawk. (Signed) "Gun" Nolan, ‘89"—or something similar; I’m afraid that poor Right Hon. Reginald must feel that it is another threat against his life from a mad, militant suffragette.

Another mistake is to address me as: Charlie McKenna, ‘89, Fleet-street, London. Such letters go to 89 Fleet-street, which is the address of a man who makes scales and weighbridges, and thinks that "Old Xaverian" is a traveller’s advertisement for some new sort of port wine.

Even when I wrote to O’Keefe (‘98) the other day, on this same sort of note paper which is headed "The Standard," Shoe Lane, Fleet Street, his reply was addressed to The Strand, Shoe Lane, Fleet Street, which is much the same as writing, "The Esplanade, Bourke Street, St. Kilda Road." But the London postman is a great fellow, and he finds me eventually.

As for myself, I have just completed a four months’ tour of the health and holiday resorts of this country as special correspondent of this paper, and have had a royal time. I visited over fifty towns, most of them famous in history, and was officially conducted and shown all the sights. I have just had a fortnight in Dublin describing the strike, and was greatly helped by certain pamphlets published by Father L. McKenna, S.J. I went to Mass in the Cathedral, and have seen nothing more impressive than the tremendously firm grip the Catholic faith has on the people of Ireland.

Best of luck to you and to all Xaverians—past and present.

Yours sincerely,

J. C. McKENNA (‘89).