

MATOUSEK, Karel I.

PEOPLE *still Jan 3/97 p 1*

Czech cheque better late than never for vet

Bel - Brno (follower)
Represents his pay for fighting with Allied Forces

By Chris Malette
The Intelligencer

Karel Matousek is one happy Czech-Canadian — now that he has his cheque.

Matousek, 76, served from 1938 to 1945 under the Czech flag with Allied Forces fighting Germans all over Europe and North Africa.

Just last week, Matousek finally got paid for his seven years of service.

The retired Belleville jack-of-all-trades, who has driven taxi, school bus and operated a gas station in the city in recent years, received a cheque from the Czech Republic for just under \$8,000 — a little more than \$1,000 for every year of service he gave in the war.

The Czech government is trying to compensate all known living or deceased nationals who fought and served under the Czech flag in the Second World War and Czech accountants finally caught up with Matousek.

He says he's grateful someone back home is still thinking of him, "even though I need a \$50 visa to go back and visit, now that I'm a Canadian citizen."

The stipend isn't much, he admits, "but, it's better than noth-

ing. I never got paid a wage when I was in the service. Just some pocket money, my uniform and weapon and rations. I never thought I was going to see any money from them and I sure wouldn't have gotten anything if the Russians had gotten their hands on me."

Matousek's cheque arrived in the mail, through the Bank of Canada, on December 24 and he followed instructions on the stipend to "cash it promptly."

In 1938, recalled Matousek, Hitler's Nazis seized Czechoslovakia and many in the country fled to free havens such as Canada.

"The smart guys, they came here to places like Batawa with Tom Bata. Other guys, like me, were still mad at Hitler and wanted to fight him."

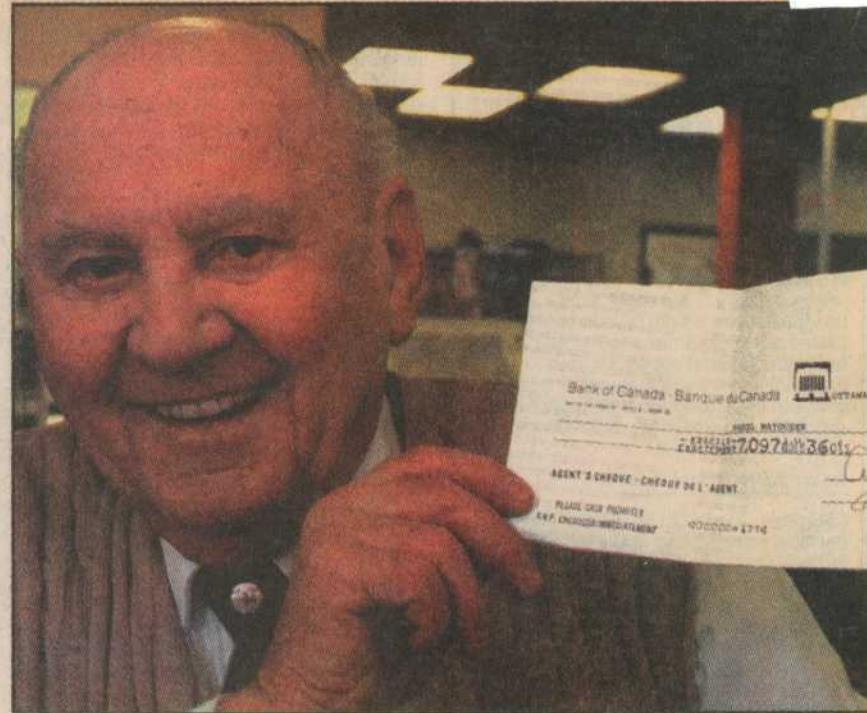
Matousek hooked up with a combined Allied unit that included Poles and Czechs and the group first began their campaign in Malta.

"We chased Rommel, the Desert Fox, all over the place," said the robust Matousek, who prides himself on his membership in the Royal Canadian Legion.

Though never wounded, Matousek saw plenty of action.

"There's no such thing as a dead hero," he said. "When the bullets start flying, you get down and stay down, behind a bush, a rock or wherever you can get."

He finished his service as a first lieutenant under the Czech flag and was rewarded by the gov-



Intelligencer photo by Chris Malette

Karel Matousek with his pay for soldiering for Czechoslovakia.

ernment there with a "pretty good government job overseeing a few villages for the government services."

But, the job lasted about six months when Russia overtook the republic. When the Russians took hold, Matousek started looking for a way out.

"I went to Italy (he speaks fluent Italian, Polish, Czech and English) and made my way to Canada,

landing at Halifax — Pier 9, to be exact — in 1951. I've been here ever since, though I've been back to Czechoslovakia to see my sister (in a village called Zbinov, about 50 km outside Prague)."

Will he see more remuneration from his homeland.

"Who knows?," he shrugs. "I might get one more (cheque). But, this was OK. Like I said, it's better than nothing."