

FLAK JACKET and ALL, ARTIST OFF to SOMALIA

Canada is sending a war artist to Somalia.

Toronto artist Allan MacKAY will spend three weeks with the Canadian Forces relief mission in the African country devastated by civil war and famine. In exchange for his expenses, MacKAY will make four paintings depicting the forces' activities. He leaves next week for Somalia under a 25-year-old program that employs artists both at home and abroad, an Armed Forces spokesman said yesterday. Major Walter Chipchase said the program is an extension of war artist programs that sent Canadian painters to Europe during both world wars and is intended to record military activity for history. During the Persian Gulf war two years ago, Edward Zuber was Canada's official war artist.

About 1,400 Canadian soldiers are stationed in Somalia to help with relief and reconstruction efforts. MacKAY, a Toronto painter and former director of the Power Plant art gallery at Harbourfront, will be outfitted with a flak jacket and sleep in a tent during his stay. He will be briefed about conditions in Somalia before he leaves and will be escorted by an officer while there.

"It's certainly not like downtown Toronto, Chipchase said. " People are being shot at. . . . He 's going into an area that has the potential for danger."