

# Somalia relief work seen firsthand

By DIANE LUND

3-29-83  
OR  
Correspondent, The Oregonian

HILLSBORO — Gordon Molitor is back in town after a year living in the bush with the Somalian refugees of northeast Africa.

The executive director of Washington County's Community Action Organization returned to his job March 1 after a one-year leave of absence.

"I'm amazed at how easy it was to come back," said the 32-year-old Molitor, who spent 12 months in Somalia, with a brief excursion to nearby Kenya. "The transition was a lot easier than I had expected."

Assigned to Somalia as a United Nations volunteer, Molitor worked with the CARE organization, assisting

**I ate goat meat and rice 90 percent of the time. I sure hungered for an Oregon apple while I was there'**

with food distribution for four refugee camps where 40,000 people lived in stick- and mat-built homes. His job was to discipline drivers, audit warehouse ledgers, run the payroll and maintain the workshop that repaired trucks.

Molitor also wrote a 50-page document outlining the socioeconomic characteristics of Somalia, which is considered one of the five poorest countries in the world. The report, which Molitor later submitted to CARE's world headquarters, examines refugee affairs, herding, forestry and agricultural needs for the next three years.

"Only 12 percent of the country's land is arable," Molitor said. "Of that, 80 percent is not being farmed. The country should be encouraged to use its potential."

While working to help feed the refugee women and children, Molitor said he witnessed no signs of starvation. CARE, which took charge of feeding and providing health care for the 150,000 refugees in Somalia four years ago, has done an excellent job, Molitor said.

Every 10 days families are given supplies of wheat or corn grain, dried skim milk, oil and beans. Once a



GORDON MOLITOR

month they receive rations of dates, tea and salt.

"I ate goat meat and rice 90 percent of the time," said Molitor, who lived in a round stick house and got his drinking water from a barrel. "I sure hungered for an Oregon apple while I was there."

Molitor said the homeless plight of the refugees was far worse than their food needs. Driven out of Ethiopia five years ago, the refugees cannot return home, and the Somalians want them to stay.

"It's a frustrating experience for them; they're just

**Many boys go into the bush because there aren't enough grazing water holes for their camels**

in a holding pattern," Molitor said. "Most of the men have left, and just the women and children remain in the camps."

Molitor's most unusual experience in Somalia was talking, via a translator, with a young nomad who was preparing to go into the bush with his camel herd. The boy would be living in the bush for the next six months.

"Here was one of the few people left on earth who was untouched by modern times," Molitor said. "He required so very little for his survival."

The nomad was taking just a few possessions with him into the bush, including two pieces of cloth and a belt as his clothing, a stick to herd the camels, a knife, bark, a small stool used as a pillow — his only piece of furniture — sandals made from an old tire, a small bag of chewing tobacco, soap, matches, a flashlight and a mirror.

"I saw how little you need to make a life there," Molitor said. "Many of the young boys go into the bush because there aren't enough grazing water holes for their camels."

While stationed at the refugee camps, Molitor occasionally would drive into Mogadishu, Somalia's cap-

ital, in a four-wheel-drive Jeep. He didn't have any difficulty maneuvering the vehicle but found the Somalian roads anything but smooth.

"They're worse than Oregon's logging roads," Molitor said. "I drove across one road and landed in a mud puddle waist-deep. My Jeep had to be pulled out by the Somalian army. The mud puddles over there are blocks long. And, there aren't any signs to warn you."

He said water trucks broke down constantly or fell into mud puddles on the road from Mogadishu to the camps, a trip that could take up to four days. Molitor found a much more creative solution. He asked the U.N. high commissioner on refugees for money to buy 13 donkey carts. He then found an equal number of large wooden barrels and refugees who owned donkeys. A route was set to deliver the water via donkey to the camps — a method more economical and reliable than using the diesel-powered trucks.

Back home, Molitor said he's not eager to return to Somalia but does expect to travel to other foreign countries.

"I'm glad I did it; the experience didn't change me a whole bunch, but it did make my mind a pleasant place in which to live," he said. "I'd encourage others to get a taste of a foreign culture, even though it may not be as extreme as Somalia."