

A Bad Trip: The 18½ Miss

By Art Buchwald

Capitol

The Middle East settlement hit a snag this week when it was discovered that 18½ miles of the Suez Canal were missing. Israelis who had custody of the canal could not explain what happened to the 18½ miles, but they did ask that the public withhold judgment until all the facts were in.

The UN special prosecutor's office is investigating the incident, the most serious to be revealed since the break-in of the waterway in 1967.

Experts who have been studying the canal insist the disappearance of the 18½ miles could not be an accident.

"Someone," an expert testified, "deliberately removed the portion of the canal to hide crucial evidence."

Reminded by the UN special prosecutor that the Israelis promised to turn over the entire canal for inspection, Avram Ben Igon, Moshe Dayan's personal law-

yer, told the UN he had no idea what had happened to the 18½ miles. "It had been in a safe and guarded by our secret service for six years. Only four or five people had access to it."

Asked who they were the lawyer replied, "Moshe Dayan, Gen. Bar Kochba, the Suez Canal custodian and Rose Mary Eban, Dayan's personal secretary."

Miss Eban testified she may have accidentally erased five miles of the canal with her foot when she was making a telephone call, but she couldn't explain what happened to the rest of it. She said she had worked on the canal at Mr. Dayan's request the weekend before negotiations between Egypt and Israel began.

She testified, "The canal was in very bad shape and I had a very difficult time with it. After I made the telephone call and went back to measuring the canal I

ing Miles in the Suez Canal

Punishment

realized it was short, and I immediately went to report it to Mr. Dayan. He didn't seem too worried and he told me, 'Don't worry, Rose Mary, the canal isn't important to peace negotiations.'

UN observers, however, have maintained that the 18½ miles was indeed essential and the disappearance of it might have an effect on the Arab oil embargo.

Gen. Bar Kochba testified that only he and Dayan and Rose Mary had a combination to the safe where the canal was kept. "I believe some sinister force may have gotten into the safe and stolen the 18½ miles. I remember giving Rose Mary the canal that weekend, but to the best of my recollection it was all there."

The missing portion of the canal is from Qantara to Ismalia and Egyptian engineers maintain they will be unable to reopen the waterway until it is found.

The UN special prosecutor's office has tried to question Mr. Dayan on his role in the affair but he claimed executive privilege. His press spokesman Ronald Allon says that Dayan knows nothing about the missing 18½ miles. "He had nothing to do with it, and he has ordered a full investigation to find out what happened. It's obvious that radical groups are trying to impeach Dayan over this minor incident. Mr. Dayan is sure that no one on his staff would have erased any portion of the canal to protect him from prosecution."

The gap in the Suez Canal has caused great consternation in Cairo, Jerusalem and Washington, D.C. If it doesn't turn up in the next few days Henry Kissinger may have to fly back to Kilometer 101 and start all over again.

UN observers refused to place guilt on any of the parties involved, but yesterday Moshe Dayan's aides told Rose Mary Eban, "I think you had better get a lawyer."