



FOURTH SUPPLEMENT

TO

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FRIDAY, 25 JANUARY, 1918.

War Office,
25th January, 1918.

The Secretary of State for War has received the following Despatch from General Sir Edmund Allenby, G.C.M.G., K.C.B., Commanding-in-Chief, Egyptian Expeditionary Force:—

General Headquarters,
Egyptian Expeditionary Force,
16th December, 1917.

MY LORD,—

I have the honour to submit a report on the operations of the Force serving in Egypt and Palestine since 28th June, 1917, the date on which I assumed command.

1. When I took over the command of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force at the end of June, 1917, I had received instructions to report on the conditions in which offensive operations against the Turkish Army on the Palestine front might be undertaken in the autumn or winter of 1917.

After visiting the front and consulting with the Commander of the Eastern Force, I submitted my appreciation and proposals in a telegram despatched in the second week of July.

2. The main features of the situation on the Palestine front were then as follows:—

The Turkish Army in Southern Palestine held a strong position extending from the sea at Gaza, roughly along the main Gaza-Beersheba Road to Beersheba. Gaza had been made into a strong modern fortress, heavily entrenched and wired, offering every facility for protracted defence. The remainder of the enemy's line consisted of a series of strong localities, viz.: the Sihan group of works, the Atawineh group, the Baha group, the Abu Hareira-Arab el Teeaha trench system, and, finally, the works covering Beersheba. These groups of works were generally from 1,500 to 2,000 yards apart, except that the distance from the Hareira group to Beersheba was about $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles.

The enemy's force was on a wide front, the distance from Gaza to Beersheba being about 30 miles; but his lateral communications were good, and any threatened point of the line could be very quickly reinforced.

My force was extended on a front of 22 miles, from the sea, opposite Gaza, to Gamli.

Owing to lack of water I was unable, without preparations which would require some considerable time, to approach within striking dis-