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*Printed for the War Cabinet. February 1941.***SECRET.**

Copy No. 28

W.P. (41) 32.*February 16, 1941.***TO BE KEPT UNDER LOCK AND KEY.**

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WAR CABINET.**OPERATIONS IN LIBYA.***Note by the Secretary of State for War.*

I CIRCULATE, for the information of my colleagues, the annexed telegram which has been received from the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, regarding the operations in Libya.

D. M.

*War Office, S.W. 1,
February 16, 1941.*

(I/41035)

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FOR reasons operational secrecy no previous publicity given activities armoured division. At your discretion these can now be broadcast. Success phase operations starting Sidi Barrani and culminating Benghazi has been due in large measure to ascendancy moral and material established by armoured division over enemy from very outset Italian declaration of War. From word go armoured division took offensive and, with the exception of period during which they were withdrawn for strategical reasons to allow Italian forces to stretch themselves across frontier to Sidi Barrani, they have consistently attacked. In early days units of armoured division penetrated and temporarily cleared tracts of hostile territory running into thousands of square miles. Gradually they were pressed back by establishment successive defended localities by forces numerically superior as ten to one employing artillery twenty or thirty to one. Result, this extraordinary moral ascendancy evident every stage of operations leading to capture Benghazi. If British armoured units even in small number appeared to threaten line of retreat, first Italian impulse was to hesitate and then assume defensive instead of trying to break through. Using different methods of surprise bold use of numerically inferior forces worked time after time. Spectacular finish to this phase epitomises not only dash of its leaders and determination tenacity of troops, but it also speaks volumes for quality and standard of British equipment. For nearly eight months armoured division has been employed without rest. Vehicles which had already withstood strain protracted operations in worst possible conditions sand and heat were able in last dash to make final and protracted burst which completely surprised enemy. Weight for class Italian tanks, many of them newly delivered from manufacturers, proved no match for British products. Other (? facts) value of long and carefully

[22230]

directed individual and collective training, physical fitness, individual initiative and contribution by workers at home to victories in the field. Publicity may also be given to activities of long-range desert patrols. Italian garrisons at Kufra and other desert posts provided amongst other duties L. of C. for interchange Italian aircraft between Libya and Italian East Africa. Kufra also constituted potential threat to Nile Valley soon after declaration war, long-range desert patrols formed under leadership major, now lieut.-colonel, Bagnold with nucleus scattered Englishmen who in peace time made their hobby exploration of Libyan Desert. Within six weeks of inception, patrols composed picked officers and men New Zealand forces and Royal Armoured Corps started their activities. In conditions of indescribable hardship these patrols constantly scoured desert, shooting up convoys, destroying petrol dumps and generally harassing Italian desert garrisons. Immediate result was cessation of normal supply convoys, increase Italian garrisons and many other comings and goings. Having achieved first object our patrols in concert Free French commenced operations in (? Fed An). Story of our action with French co-operation at Murzuk, our capture of Traghan and other lesser posts has already been told by General Catroux. Original personnel have now been augmented by volunteers from British units and Rhodesians. In company with French, operations by our long-range desert patrols are now in progress about Kufra. As further tribute to British workmanship, noteworthy that vehicles by these patrols have now covered total distance half a million miles without loss of single vehicle from mechanical breakdown, this is all the more praiseworthy if realised that for obvious reasons patrols unable use recognised tracks and have found their own ways over sand seas, uncharted desert, outcrops of rock and other difficulties previously considered by most seasoned explorers to be totally impassible. As final note, service of transport drivers throughout all operations in Libya in desert Sudan and Kenya merits special mention. Their work has been magnificent. Undeterred by perpetual sandstorms, by bombing, by shortage of water and other physical difficulties our transport drivers British, from Dominions, India, Cyprus and Cape have never failed to support their comrades in fighting line by delivering their loads at right place and time. Road maintenance of vehicles has been above reproach, courage and devotion to duty admirable.
