



[Official War Photo.]

**Driver F. J. Mitchell, of Wyndham, Southland, digging in after the New-Zealanders had landed on Vella Lavella.**

As we arrived on Mono a heavy shower of rain fell. The bush dripped, the half-made roads became streams, and water seemed to penetrate everywhere. When we walked our boots acquired thick coral soles from the paths, and when we drove the jeeps squelched through deep mudholes and slid over great roots. For nearly a fortnight our troops here had lived in the bush on iron rations, lying down to sleep on their ground-sheets and managing as best they could. Here was real jungle, dark and wet with few open spaces. Photographs without a flashlight were almost out of the question. The men were working hard to establish camps. Without shirts, they were covered in mud and filth. They had to hack their way through the bush, clearing paths, building bridges, felling trees, and removing roots

and stumps. The jungle was so thick that a division could be concealed within a few hundred yards; yet the work of clearing it went on in terrific unrelenting heat.

I remember talking on Vella Lavella to a soldier who had something to say about conditions in the islands.

"It's this heat we don't like," he said, "and the rain and mud and mossies and other insects. We hate the sight of coconut-palms and the taste of dehydrated food, and we've nowhere to go if we get any leave. What we think about is good food and hot baths and iced beer back home. Tell any one who thinks we're enjoying this that any of us will gladly change places with him."

I certainly have no wish to see the Solomons again.