

instance with the picquets alone, I shall have to meet under every possible disadvantage, yet I am very much disposed to hope may be the most fortunate circumstance that can happen, as it will bring us into contact with the enemy at a far cheaper rate than if we were to be the assailants, and may at the same time, I trust, bring to a happy crisis a campaign which has been marked by a series of unlucky circumstances as well as of late severe hardships and privations on the part of the troops, which I am happy in repeating have borne themselves with the utmost cheerfulness, and have evinced a degree of steadiness and spirit highly honourable to them."

In this opinion he was confirmed by the ease with which a sortie of four hundred riflemen and volunteers at daybreak that morning had been repelled by the picquets alone. The officer who led the attack was killed and one man made prisoner. For the purpose of defending his batteries from a sudden assault the infantry was then divided into three brigades, numbering less than a thousand rank and file, each of which occupied the trenches and furnished the picquets in turn, while the other two remained at the camp.

Torrents of rain fell almost incessantly for the next three days, converting the low ground into a succession of shallow ponds. The American troops being fairly sheltered from the storm in houses, subterranean chambers and tents, which had been lately provided with floors, suffered far less from the weather than the besiegers and were maintained in comparative good health and spirits, while deserters from the British lines reported that the troops occupying them were fatigued, miserable and much discouraged and that General Drummond was already contemplating the removal of his camp to some healthier situation.

These reports determined General Brown to revive his project of a sortie against the siege works to dismantle them, and "roughly handle" the brigade upon duty in the trenches before the supports could come from the camp to their aid. With this purpose he directed his own batteries to open fire on the 15th and 16th, and sent out two strong fatigue parties of experienced axemen, drafted from the militia, to mark out and prepare a road by which infantry could advance through the woods from Snake Hill to the rear of the extreme right of the British by blazing trees and cutting away the underbrush. These parties succeeded in approaching unheard and unseen within one hundred and fifty yards of the trenches, and thence returned to their own lines, removing the brushwood and other obstructions as they went along. Two parallel roads, about thirty yards apart, were thus cleared.

Learning that the brigade, including DeWatteville's Regiment,