NEAR BELLE FONTAINE, FRANCE, JULY 11, 1944—Shortly after midnight, German guns laid down a brief artillery barrage onto positions held by the 1st Battalion of the US Army’s 115th Infantry Regiment, which had recently been brought up to the front line to relieve the battle-worn 116th after a 48-hour rest three miles behind the front lines.

As the bombardment eased, elements of the 3rd Fallschirmjaeger Division—including a handful of combat engineers armed with flamethrowers—assaulted the still-dazed Americans, who were themselves preparing for an early morning attack against these very same German troops.