Freedom

April 29, 1945
A rusty, iron gate reading "arbeit macht frei"
A smoke stack looming overhead
The sky is graying
Burgundy, brick barracks
and damp, soured air
Children's whimpers drowned out by
German threats
Emaciated humans lying in ditches
Ignored, no one there to mourn them
But even so, a thumb twitches
An eye blinks
Walking skeletons, but it's not Halloween
This is real.
This is a graveyard for the living.
Innocent living.
Sons, wives, grandparents
Teachers, doctors, lawyers
Limbs limp, cheekbones hollow
because arbeit macht frei

Fletcher Thorne-Thomsen.
20 years old and 4,500 miles from home
A duty to fulfill
He is the first of his platoon,
nervously stepping onto the grounds of Dachau concentration camp.
Tip-toeing, looking left and right, unsure of what may await him.
What is this place? Oh, it must be a factory.
The smoke stack, you see. Nothing too frightening.
But there is a Jewish man.
A Jewish man sitting in his barracks, icy with fear.
Dark hair, weak eyes, ivory skin
just thick enough to conceal bone.
He's speaking
German? Hebrew?
It doesn't matter.
There are 50 years of terror in his eyes
50 years of arbeit macht frei.

May 8, 1945.
Peacetime
or so Fletcher thinks
Boom! Boom! reload
Boom Boom! Boom!
Silence.
But who to walk
to the other side of the hill
to reveal the hands that pulled the triggers?
None but Fletcher.
Part of the G-2 section, he must be courageous
He must risk his life
He may never go home
This could be the end.
But maybe not.
Ten young boys on the other side of the hill.
Hitler Youths.
These young men didn't know what they were fighting for
other than arbeit macht frei.

After liberation, he comes home.
A hero.
Unknown to many,
but one who affected many.
Fletcher Thorne-Thomsen
Now 93 years old,
living in his quaint home.
He sits alone with his wife and looks out of his window
Reminiscing on those sad times.
Those sad times he fought for arbeit macht frei.
Because, after all, his work made thousands free.