

# Teaching Resource: The Silent Division & Concerning One Mans War

Author: O.E. Burton

John Douglas Publishing Ltd

## **Curriculum Level**

Years 11-13 (NCEA levels 1-3)

## **Social Sciences**

One man, two wars, opposing ethics. This is the enigma or Ormond Burton. The New Zealand school teacher enlisted in World War I as an army medic. He was awarded the Military Medal and French Medaille d'Honneur for courage under fire. Then, seeking closer solidarity with his suffering comrades, he transferred to the infantry as a combatant soldier.

He was several times wounded but stood to his duty so well that he was chosen for a commission. How things changed. Two decades later New Zealand was sending troops to fight Germany again.

Though Burton loathed the evils of Nazism, he was by then an outspoken anti-war activist.

He was arrested for his public pacifist orations and writings. He was warned to stop but he refused.

Under wartime emergency regulations he was imprisoned. He served nearly two years in jail.

## **Part One:**

A reissue of the original *The Silent Division*, enhanced with maps and illustrations.

## **Part Two:**

*Concerning One Man's War*, drawn from Burton's unpublished memoir *A Rich Old Man*, providing a personal narrative of his wartime experiences.

John Douglas Publishing Ltd NZ This edition is edited by Brigadier John H. Gray and features a biography of Burton by David Grant, along with a foreword by Dr. Christopher Pugsley

To enrich students' understanding of World War I and New Zealand's role in War consider the following approaches: Australian War Memorial+4John Douglas Publishing  
<https://www.jdpublishing.co.nz/th-silent-division.html>

**Historical Context:** Use the book to explore New Zealand's military history, focusing on the Western Front and the formation of national identity during the war.

**Literary Analysis:** Examine Burton's narrative style, comparing his third-person accounts with his personal reflections in *Concerning One Man's War*.

Ethical Discussions: Delve Into Burton's transformation from soldier to pacifist, prompting discussions on the moral complexities of war.

Primary Source Evolution: Analyze excerpts from the book as primary sources to understand soldier's experiences and sentiments during the war.

### **Supplementary Sources**

To support your teaching, the following resources provide additional insights into Ormond Burton's life and work:

**Video Documentary:** The Great War Stories episode on Ormond Burton offers a visual narrative of his wartime experiences and subsequent pacifism.

**Biographical Information:** The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography provides a detailed account of Burton's life, including his military service and post-war activities.

**Historical Context:** The NZ History website features a comprehensive overview of Burton's contributions during and after the war

### **Accessing the Book**

The 2014 edition of *The Silent Division* is available for purchase through:

- John Douglas Publishing: Order directly from the publisher.

[www.jdpublishing.co.nz](http://www.jdpublishing.co.nz)

Additionally, the book can be found in various libraries across New Zealand

## **Sources: Lesson Plans**

Here is a set of three structured lesson plans for *The Silent Division* by Ormond Burton, suitable for senior secondary students (Years 11-13), integrating history, English, and critical thinking outcomes

### **Lesson Plan 1 (1 hour)**

**Understanding the Historical Context Duration.**

**Focus:** New Zealand's involvement in World War I and the formation of national identity

**Learning Objective:**

Identify key events involving New Zealand forces during WWI.

Understand the historical context of *The Silent Division*.

Explore the concept of national identity forged through war.

**Activities:**

**Starter** (10 min): Class discussion - „What do you already know about New Zealand in WWI?“

**Reading** (15 min): Assigned passages covering Gallipoli or the Western Front.

**Group Work** (20 min): In small groups, students create a visual timeline using Burton's descriptions and compare them with textbook facts.

**Debrief** (15 min): Share and reflect on how Burton's narrative adds emotional/human insight to historical facts.

**Homework:**

Reads selected chapter(s) on Passchendaele or the Somme.

**Lesson Plan 2 (1 Hour)****Literary and Personal Voice**

**Focus:** Analyzing Burton's narrative voice and structure

**Learning Objective:**

Analyze the use of third-person and first-person narrative.

Discuss the reliability and emotional impact of memoir-style writing.

Compare contrasting tones in *The Silent Division* and concerning *One Man's War*.

**Activities:**

**Starter** (5 min): Quick write - „What makes a soldier's account of war powerful?“

**Reading** (20 min): Side-by-side reading of excerpts from both parts of the book (3rd vs 1st person).

**Analysis** (20 min): Textual analysis in pairs - tone, imagery, and bias.

**Discussion** (15 min): How do perspective and voice influence our understanding of war?

**Homework:**

Write a reflective diary entry as if you were a soldier in one of the battles described.

**Lesson Plan 3 (1 Hour)****Ethics, Pacifism, and Legacy**

**Focus:** Burton's transformation from soldier to pacifist and the ethical dilemmas of war

**Learning Objective:**

Explore moral questions raised by war.

Understand Burton's post-war life and beliefs.

Reflect on differing responses to trauma and violence.

**Activities:**

**Starter** (10 min): Watch short clip: Ormond Burton - Great War Story.

**Reading** (15 min): Read passages on Burton's post-war reflections and stance on pacifism.

**Discussion** (20 min): In small groups, debate: „Was Burton's pacifism a betrayal or a deepening of patriotism?“

**Assessment Task (Optional):** Essay: „How does Ormond Burton's life and writing challenge traditional narratives of heroism?“