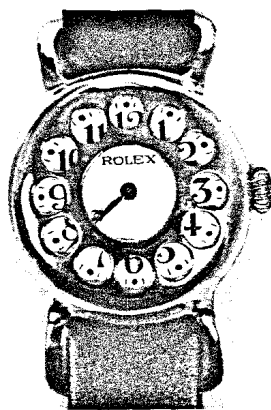


It is no secret to the readers of this journal that fashion designers through the years have relied heavily upon the military for their inspiration. Many are the contributions that the armies of the world have unwittingly made to the march of fashion; in this century alone, they have “borrowed” khaki and cumberbuns in addition to cargo pants, shoulder straps, and white crew-neck t-shirts. Many colors that are generally associated with one military organization or another have, with the fullness of time, played important parts in various fashion statements: navy blue, Prussian blue, olive drab, cadet gray, and British scarlet—to say nothing of all the various camouflage patterns that one sees on the street daily.

The wrist watch is another such example. For the past eighty years, the wrist watch has served as one of the few fashion accessories allowed to men and yet, as the following 1918 article from the American Army newspaper *Stars & Stripes* makes clear, this was not always the case.<sup>1</sup> The article plainly states that the wrist watch was a flop in the men’s fashion market when it first appeared and sported only by a highly suspect caste of men. It was only the role that the timepiece played during World War I that helped to wrestle the wrist watch away from this alienated sub-culture and make it a standard fashion accessory in the male repertoire, where it has remained ever since.

FIG 1. World War I era Rolex watch with stone guard slipped over the strap to protect the glass crystal from damage in rough conditions. Photo courtesy of AdeQ Historical Archives.



## THE WRIST WATCH SPEAKS

I am the wrist watch.

Before the war I was worn by women. Bejeweled and fragile, I hung about their dainty wrists, looked at more for the gems that adorned me than for the time I kept.

I was also worn by lounge-lizards, the boys who had their handkerchiefs tucked up their sleeves, who would as soon be seen without their highly polished canes as without their trousers, the little lads who tried to sport monocles and endeavored in vain to grow mustaches and to cultivate un-American accents.

I was the mark of the woman and the she-man. I was ridiculed by stage comedians, by cartoonists of the press, by haberdashers and men’s outfitters of all sorts. To buy me was to buy metal ostracism at the hands of one’s fellow creatures. To wear me in public, in the allegedly more rugged portions of the Middle West was to invite physical violence. To flaunt me in the face of the Arizona cowboy—my whole works tremble to think of the consequences.

But now—behold me, revived, reglorified, part and parcel of the practical equipment for the most practical of wars!

Tuned to the minute, I give the time for the marching millions from the base ports to the front.

From the general down to the newly arrived bad private, they all wear me, they all swear by me instead of at me.

On the wrist of every line officer in the front line trenches, I point to the hour, minute and second at which the waiting men spring from the trenches to the attack.

I, the once-despised, am the final arbiter as to when the barrage shall be laid down, when it shall be advanced, when it shall cease, when it shall resume. I need but point with my tiny hands and the signal is given that means life or death to thousands upon thousands.

My phosphorous glow soothes and charms the chilled sentry, as he stands, waist deep in water amid the impenetrable blackness, and tells him how long he must watch there before his relief is due.

I mount guards, I dismiss guards. Everything that is done in the army itself, that is done for the army behind the lines, must be done according to my dictates. True to the Greenwich Observatory, I work over all men in khaki my rigid and imperious sway.

I go where I please without passes. Perched above the deft and delicate fingers of surgeons, I am present at all operations. On the hairy forearms of the husky artillerymen, I am there with every tug of the lanyard, and can feel the firm biceps tighten from below.

I am in all and of all, at the heart of every move in this man’s war. I am the witness to every action, the chronicler of every second that the war ticks on its way. Lifted forever and forever above the poodle-dog class of useless ornament. I am the instructor, the arbiter, the consoler, the friend of every officer and every man.

I am, in this war, the indispensable, the always-to-be-reckoned with.  
I am the wrist watch.

## Note

1. *The Stars & Stripes*, 15 February 1918, page 2:

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