

From the fields of conflict

How the tenets of military and sporting apparel have helped men's garments earn their stripes.

What do the Cartier Tank, Aviator sunglasses and the bomber jacket all have in common? Like much else at the altitudinous end of a vertical scale measuring menswear desirability, they were all inspired by the military. And, the DNA strand that runs through the polo shirt, trainers and the hoodie is, of course, sporting endeavour. The blazer, meanwhile, has its roots in both armed and civilian conflict. Many of the sartorial traditions and élan of bespoke tailoring also went straight from the battlefield to the boardroom, while equestrian and field sports have contributed more than their fair share of the stylistic tenets still executed on The Row.

There's more to military and sporting influence over modern day menswear, though, than instantly recognisable wardrobe staples and Savile Row tailoring. Take the humble (and yet so eminently dashing) stripe. Fashion's on-off love affair with horizontal banding around garments has its origin in the 'marinière' shirts issued to the French Navy in 1858, each stripe representing one of Napoleon's military victories. Favoured by the maritime Celtic-speaking denizens of Brittany, the design eventually became dubbed 'the Breton stripe'.

The origin of vertical stripes in fashion is a more opaque business, but college-style blazers bearing them straddle the line between military and sporting tradition (the Royal Navy crew of HMS Blazer wore blue and white striped jackets, although the word is thought to originate from the Lady Margaret Boat Club in the early 19th Century). Cricket and tennis have also, at different times in different places, embraced this bold and brazen sartorial theme.

Of course, stripes both horizontal and vertical have connotations of military insignia and flags – the latter being mostly designed for instant recognition during maritime conflict, hence their inherent simplicity (with the exception of Britain's three-into-one configuration). And, stripes that stretch both across and down the wearer's anatomy are playing key roles when it comes to Hackett's current creative endeavours.

"Stripes were really important for Spring /Summer 18," says Gianni Colarossi, Head of Design, Mayfair and Tailoring at Hackett. One part of the collection is called 'Devon Air' – a play on words that references the British coastline. "That's where the horizontal stripes come in," he says. "We've made them more colourful, more playful than ever before. Another of our themes is called the 'Great British Stripe', which includes a collaboration with the Henley Regatta, and that has both military and Regatta connotations. We've done literal things like striped boating blazers, but also taken that into our accessories,



Brazil star Vava
pictured before
a club game in
Brazil, circa 1959.

as well as into shirting, trousers and swimwear."

The appeal of a brand carving its own niche, impervious to the fickle zeitgeist of mainstream fashion, is clearly one that appeals to Colarossi. "Not a lot of people are selling stripes – talk to the shirt mills and they're selling textures and mini-graph checks – but we really believe in them, and want to make the statement of really going after them."

Will Hackett's reverence for all things military and sporting continue beyond these projects? "Absolutely. We're really looking at subtle military references – using moleskin, as well as heavier wools and felts, in coats, which will have epaulette details, perhaps, or cuff detailing and buttons with a militaryesque nod to them."

Many a great thinker has pondered the relationship between sport and war. In modern menswear it would seem, the two sing in mellifluous harmony.