I propose to present a paper on an hitherto overlooked aspect of Civil War Patriotic envelopes. Specifically I am interested in patriotic envelopes, North and South, designed principally for and sold to Union and Confederate soldiers. I intend to examine the types of designs used by soldiers and to determine too what extent they were different from those marketed to civilians? I am also interested in the role played by soldiers in the creation of these designs and how they were distributed. It is my hypothesis that soldiers did play a key role in the design and distribution of these envelopes and the differences between military and civilian covers is an important aspect of their history.

For example, my research to date has revealed several instances in which Southern printers created and sold Confederate covers to officers of specific units. The “messages” on these unit design covers differed to a degree from those available to the public at large emphasizing the role of the soldier in preserving the new Confederate nation. Union officers too acquired and distributed covers to their men with messages indicative of a soldier’s perspective on the events of 1861-1865.

Furthermore, in the North a number of publishers, among them James Gates, James Hawley, Mumford and Co and others assembled “kits” or packets of envelopes, letter sheets and other items. Marketed primarily to Union soldiers as “Military Portfolio’s,” “Union Prize” and Mammoth “Camp” Packages” stationery kits, the sentiments of these packets differed from those available to the civilian population. The emphasis of these packets tended to be both more informational, identifying leaders and describing camp life as well as more martial or warlike in spirit.

Some have suggested that the designs on patriotic envelopes were irrelevant to soldiers who used whatever materials available. As the war proceeded, especially in the South, that may well have been true. But in 1861 at least soldiers clearly played a role in the creation and design of Confederate patriotic envelopes. In the North too soldiers exercised some agency in creating envelopes which they purchased selectively from among those available in the major metropolitan areas as well as in Border states and other occupied Southern territories. They were not merely passive recipients of the mail, but active participants in the creation and dissemination of patriotic envelopes which reflected their values and identity.