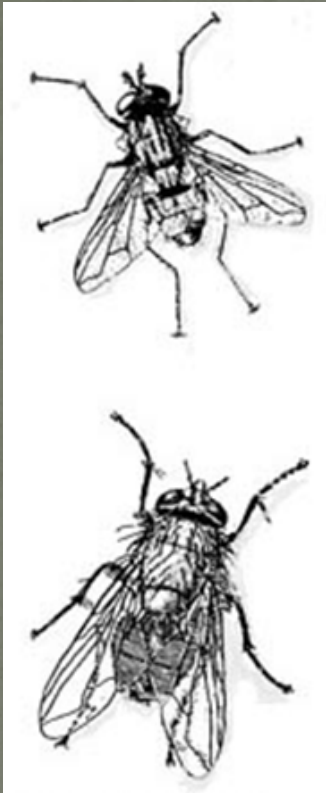


# *Civil War Science*

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## *Station 1*



Flies were a common problem for soldiers. They helped in transmitting (passing) disease causing organisms. This meant that soldiers were more likely to get sick.

At the start of the Civil War, communities throughout the North and South began assembling troops. It was clear that insects were also preparing for war. House flies, blow flies, and bottle flies are all examples of some non-biting flies that can be extremely problematic and probably confronted the soldiers throughout the war.

Early in the war, one Confederate described the fly problem in camp:

*When we open our eyes in the morning we find the canvas roofs and walls of our tents black with them [flies] . . . It needs no morning reveille then to rouse the soldier from his slumbers. The tickling sensations about the ears, eyes, mouth, nose, etc., caused by the microscopic feet and inquisitive suckers of an army numerous as the sands of the sea shore will awaken a regiment of men from innocent sleep to wide-awake profanity more promptly than the near beat of the alarming drum. (Wiley 1994)*

The fly problems that confronted the soldiers were large. Most of the supplies that the armies of the North and South needed were transported by horses, mules, and, occasionally, oxen. In 1864, the Army of the Potomac (Union) was followed by more than

4,000 six-mule team wagons. The total number of horses and mules that began that campaign was 56,499. General Sherman's army (Union) of 60,000 was accompanied by 2,500 wagons and 600 ambulances (Billings 1887). It is probable that those wagons also were pulled by six-mule teams.



*Six Mule Team Army Wagon used in the  
Civil War.*

Meat that the soldiers ate was supplied as fresh beef, although this was often a luxury for many Confederate soldiers. To supply meat for the soldiers, large cattle trains had to be moved with the army. This massing of humanity and animals produced equally large quantities of garbage, refuse, and excrement that surrounded the soldiers from all sides. A Virginia private elaborated in his diary: "Dec. 3, 1863 . . . On rolling up my bed this morning I found I had been lying in - I won't say what - something though that didn't smell like milk and peaches" (Wiley 1994).





The large amount of garbage and filth created an excellent breeding area for flies, especially during the warmer months. The flies' presence was more than just annoying. The habit of crawling on refuse and excrement and then on humans and their food was a serious problem, one not fully realized at the time. Flies can carry organisms that cause cholera, diarrhea, dysentery, and typhoid (Greenberg 1973). By the end of the war, diseases would take the lives of more soldiers than would hostile fire (Brooks 1966).