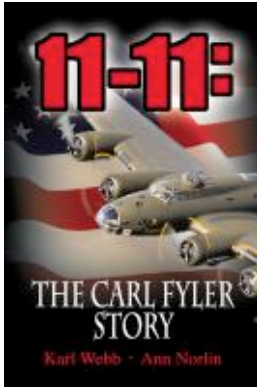


11-11:

A B-24 Liberator bomber aircraft is shown in flight, viewed from a low angle. The aircraft is olive drab with yellow accents on the engines and landing gear. It has four engines and a glass nose. The background is a stylized American flag with stars and stripes. The date '11-11' is written in large, bold, red letters with a black outline at the top of the image.

THE CARL FYLER STORY

Karl Webb • Ann Norlin



11-11: The Carl Fyler Story is the biography of a respected World War II bomber pilot who spent 510 days in a German POW camp. However, 11-11 is more than just a biography, more than just a war story. It is an appealing drama that tells the story of America through the life of one man and his ancestors, from the time the first colonists set foot on this shore until today. A real page-turner!

11-11: The Carl Fyler Story

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11-11: The Carl Fyler Story

Karl Webb and Ann Norlin

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First Edition

Beginnings



The room at the Veteran's Administration long-term care facility was spartan. There was nothing comforting or home-like about the cold tile floors and the sparse furnishings that consisted of a hospital bed, a dresser and a TV that echoed in the bare room. Carl Fyler lay in this bed and looked at the institutional walls around him. It wasn't the first time he had to mark time by staring at walls, held in a place against his will. It was almost like the solitary confinement he had experienced in Nazi Germany more than 60 years before. The irony of the situation

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was not lost on him. Once again he was fighting for his life, and not just his own. This time, he was fight for his wife Marguerite as well.

He had come to the VA willingly enough. He had, after all, been starving to death, and fighting to get the VA to realize that for more than a year now. At first, he merely choked more frequently than usual, but things had progressed to the point where he could not keep any food down. He would go to the VA outpatient clinic where they would poke and prod and scope, then send him home with prescriptions for acid reflux and instructions to return in three months. Didn't they understand? He couldn't get the food down! He wasn't able to take in enough calories to sustain him! He had lost 80 lbs. in a little over a year, more than he had lost during the whole time he had been a POW. He was starving to death in his own home.

Carl's memory of those few months was dark around the edges. As he became more and more malnourished, his mind had gotten more and more fuzzy. He did remember that several women from his church were taking turns bringing him soup and tapioca and nutrition shakes, as these went down easier than anything else, but it was of no avail. He was growing weaker and weaker. He knew that at the rate he had been going, he would have been gone by Thanksgiving. He had fallen numerous times, and then didn't have the strength to get back up. Once he had fallen in the back yard and lay there for hours before he could get up, with the black ants biting him. His pastor had been putting pressure on him to contact his nephews in Tulsa, Oklahoma, but he had been reluctant. He wrote to his nephews all the time, and they to him, but he had not let them know just how bad things were getting. It was hard to admit he needed help, even to himself.

"No, I don't want to bother them," he said to the pastor. "They're busy with their own lives and I don't want to be a burden to them." His nephews were the sons of his beloved sister Gloria. He and Gloria had been through so much together over the years. Who would have thought she would have passed on so many years before he did? He

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sighed. He knew that if Gloria were still alive, he could turn to her for help, like he frequently had in the past.

Finally, toward the end of October, the VA hospital admitted him. Carl could have gone to the civilian hospital, but he chose to go to the VA. He had been willing to give up everything for love of his country. He had earned the right to be taken care of by that country.

The VA told him they were going to do surgery to insert a stomach tube to bypass what was believed to be a blockage in his esophagus. Carl thought this would be a temporary measure and he would be home again soon, but he had been wrong.

His housekeeper had brought him to the VA hospital, where he was given a room and then he waited. There seemed to be some confusion as to when and how the surgery would be done, and he grew weaker still. Meanwhile, Marguerite was home alone, and this was a great worry to him. How could she manage on her own? He knew the compassionate women from the church were taking turns going to check on her, but still she shouldn't be alone. Carl was despondent. There was no one to turn to; no one to trust, and he didn't have the energy to fight any more. He had not been this low since the days just after the war.

Finally, Carl was sent by the VA to a local hospital for the placement of the stomach tube. He would later learn that his friend, the United States Senator, with whom he had worked on veteran's rights issues for so long, had become aware of his predicament and intervened on his behalf. At long last Carl would be able to take in nourishment again. But as he lay on the cold surgery table he had never felt more alone in his life. He worried about Marguerite. She was his faithful and loving companion and he missed her. He began to worry about what would happen to her if he died. He had not really considered that he might go first. He had drawn up a trust, but he wasn't sure if he had done everything he needed to do to put his house in order. The worry rolled over him in waves. He was afraid, not for himself, but for Marguerite.

Carl had become justifiably concerned that there were those who were out for his money, and he knew they would go through her to get it.

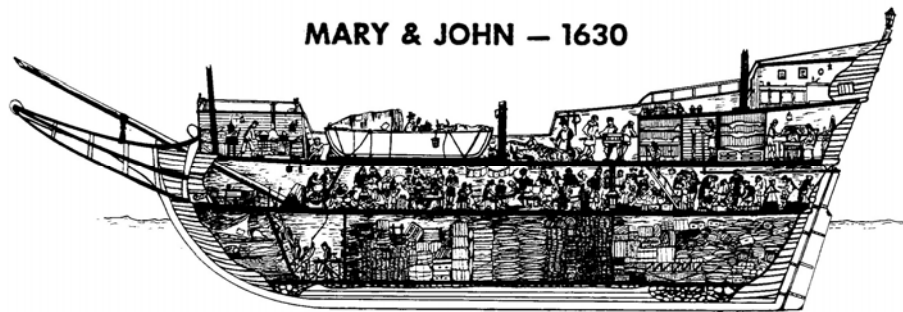
As Carl lay in the pre-op room thinking these thoughts, the door had opened and his pastor had entered the room. He had never been so happy to see someone. She sat down next to him and held his hand as he poured out to her his concerns for his wife. At last they came to take him to surgery. She said a prayer with him, and then they wheeled him away.

When Carl awoke again, he was back at the VA. As he looked at the tube in his abdomen he realized that he was as dependent upon it now as he had been to the oxygen lines back in that B-17 bomber he still flew in his dreams. That is how he ended up in this place, separated from his wife, pondering his life. As he lay there, marking time, one hour blending into another, his mind began to wonder ...

As the haze cleared, he saw his beloved grandfather, Carlton P., sitting in a chair on the porch, looking off into the wide flat distance of the western Kansas prairie. Carl realized he was at his grandparent's house, a place he had been many times as a boy. He and his grandfather were close, and he loved nothing more than to sit with him on that porch and hear the stories of the past. He was surprised to find himself with his grandfather again ... so many years had passed since Carlton had left them. But he didn't question things; he just settled back into the chair and listened again to the Fyler family stories he had heard so many times before. It was nice to hear Grandfather's voice again ...

Lt. Walter Fyler was a man that captured young Carl's imagination from the start. Grandfather would say: The three children of Roman Fyler of Cornwall, England, Walter, George and Anne, and a grandson, George, Jr., decided they wished to go to the new land and worship the way they saw fit. So, in March of the year 1630 they boarded the tall sail ship the "Mary and John,"

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in a company of 140 persons. They began their journey at Plymouth, England. They arrived in the New World seventy days later, on May 30, 1630 at the mouth of what is now Boston Harbor. The ship's captain refused to sail up the Charles River as planned, because he feared running the ship aground in waters for which he had no chart. He instead left the passengers off the ship in a desolate locale, miles from their intended destination. The settlers were forced to transport 150,000 pounds of livestock, provisions and equipment 20 miles overland to their final destination. Once there, they found good pasture for their cattle at Mattapan, now known as "Dorchester Neck."

Walter was a lieutenant in the British Army. The Army in the New World was given the task of dealing with the Pequot Indians that lived in the area.

"The conflict that developed between the natives and the settlers was the first of many. In 1637 an actual war broke out between the Pequots and New England settlers. The Pequots were a warlike tribe centered along the Thames River in southeastern Connecticut. By 1630, under their chief, Sassacus, they had pushed west to the Connecticut River. There they had numerous quarrels with colonists, culminating in the murder by the Pequots of a trader, John Oldham, on July 20, 1636. On August 24, Gov. John Endicott of Massachusetts Bay Colony organized a military force to punish the Indians, and on May 26, 1637, the first battle of the

Pequot War took place when the New Englanders, under John Mason and John Underhill, attacked the Pequot stronghold near present-day New Haven, Connecticut. The Indian forts were burned and about 500 men, women and children were killed. The survivors fled in small groups. One group, led by Sassacus, was caught near present day Fairfield, Connecticut, on July 28, and nearly all were killed or captured. The captives were made slaves by the colonists or were sold in the West Indies. The Mohawk Indians put Sassacus and the few who escaped with him to death. The few remaining Pequots were scattered among other southern New England Tribes.” (4)

Walter was given a piece of land for services rendered during the war, on which he built a house that still stands today. In later years, Carl and Marguerite had gone to see the Fyler House, which is currently the home of the Windsor Historical Society in Windsor, Connecticut. Carl admired the beautiful old house, which Walter had built himself. And here it stood, on a lovely little plot of land that ran down to the river, hundreds of years later. As he stood in the house, Carl thought of the hardships the family faced in the new land. He imagined the forests that went for miles, the lack of food, the disease, and fighting the Indians. It all seemed such a grand adventure. He was from good Pilgrim stock!

Grandfather’s stories of Lt. Walter Fyler’s exploits in the new world were perfect fodder for young Carl’s adventurous mind. He could be found crawling on his stomach in the grass in front of Grandfather’s porch, popgun in hand, as he became Walter Fyler, protecting the settlers from wild animals and Indians. He had spent many days as a child re-living Grandfather’s stories of Lt. Walter Fyler. He was proud that a man such as the lieutenant was one of his ancestors, that his blood and the man who was one of the founding fathers of his country ran intermingled.

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The fact that true red, white and blue American blood flowed through Carl Fyler's veins is one that can be verified with a further walk through this country's history. There was Roger Fyler, who fought in the French and Indian War (1754-1758) and the Revolutionary War (1775-1783.) He lost a leg in the Battle of Long Island, a wound he survived, only to die of smallpox two weeks after he got home. There was Paris Fyler, who commanded the sloop "Hero" that fought the British with two guns and 16 privateers. There were John and George Fyler who were two of the infamous Knowlton Rangers. The Knowlton Rangers were named after their commanding officer Thomas Knowlton. They were the first-ever American special operations force, sent in to gain information from the British in New York City. This group was a forerunner to the modern day CIA. Famous American spy Nathan Hale was also a part of this elite group of courageous men. Carl's relatives had helped to found a country, and so when the War Between the States broke out, his family was not about to let that country be torn asunder. The history books show Fyler after Fyler who fought on the side of the Union. There was George, Michael, Jacob, Jerome, Lemuel, Wallace and Orsarnus Fyler who wore the Union Blue. The Fylers fought valiantly in such historic battles as Yorktown, Williamsburg, Petersburg, Slash Church, Spotsville, Gettysburg and Appomattox. Carl was proud to say that his ancestors served under commanders such as Maj. Gen. Phillip Sheridan, Brig. Gen. George Meade and the great Ulysses S. Grant. It was Orsarnus Fyler who stood with Grant's battle weary men on the lawn at the courthouse in Appomattox in the spring of 1865 when the Southern States' famous General Robert E. Lee signed the surrender treaty that ended the Civil War.

No, the Fyler family was not one that was afraid to stand up and fight, and Carl took deep pride in that fact.

The scene in his mind shifted back to his childhood.

It was exciting for a young boy to grow up where the Wild West began, in the small community of Spearville, near Dodge City, Kansas.

Dodge City grew up just outside of Ft. Dodge, a military post placed to protect settlers from the Indians. In addition, the buffalo hunters who fed the railroad and the country's desire for buffalo hides were operating out of Dodge. By 1872, the shiny steel rails of the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe railroad rolled into town, sparking even more growth as the cattle trade moved in with the railroad. By 1876, Dodge City was well known for lawlessness and gun slinging. Buffalo hunters, cowboys, railroad workers, drifters and soldiers were just some of the patrons of the saloons, gambling houses and brothels in the town of Dodge. Gunfights were not uncommon. The people of Dodge soon began to fear for their lives and so they hired Wyatt Earp. Four assistant deputies were also hired including another famous lawman of the Wild West, Bat Masterson, Wyatt's old buffalo hunting friend. Earp instituted a gun-toting rule that said carrying a gun was unlawful, and was in effect around the clock. Anyone found wearing a gun was immediately jailed. Soon, Dodge City's jail was filled. Everyone knew that it was not wise to draw a gun on Earp or his deputies. That action could have lethal consequences. By 1879, Dodge City had been tamed and Wyatt Earp had moved on to Tombstone, Arizona where he would have that fateful shootout in the OK Corral.

Young Carl loved to imagine that he was the hot shot Earp. He would don his toy six shooters and walk up the dusty street, his white hat on his head, his guns in his holster at his side, waiting to be instantly ready for him when he reached for them. He would take on any lawless bandit that came into town. That's what the good people of Dodge City had hired him to do. Suddenly, the hairs on the back of his neck stood up, his intuition screaming out a warning. In a flash, his hands went to his guns and they came out of the holster, already blazing.

But there was more to Carl's family history in the Wild West. While Wyatt Earp and the other gunslingers were cleaning up the Wild West, Carl's grandfather, Carlton, found himself to be an orphan. The 13

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children of George and Elisa Fyler were dispersed out to many families, a great tragedy after both parents died within months of each other. The youngest child, Carlton, then 4 years old, was taken in by a family named Mudd. The family soon moved to a farm near Abilene, Kansas where Carlton was raised. Abilene began as a stagecoach stop in 1857. The town grew quickly when Joseph G. McCoy decided to use the town for the point at which he could ship the cattle driven up from Texas to markets in the east via the newly run railroad lines in Kansas. In 1867, McCoy, a cattle buyer recently from Illinois, extended the Chisholm Cattle Trail from Wichita, Kansas north to Abilene. McCoy was able to make his wild scheme happen, and Abilene became the very first “cowtown” of the west and enhanced the legend of the American cowboy. Like Dodge City, Abilene soon went from being a peaceful town to a town full of saloons and brothels during cattle season. McCoy and other town officials soon found themselves hiring gunslingers such as Wild Bill Hickok to provide the same services for their town as Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson had provided for Dodge City. Another key player in the city of Abilene was Thomas Kirby, a banker who helped McCoy procure the money for his ventures. The Fylers and the Kirbys and the McCoy's were soon intermarried. In 1883, Carlton Fyler married the schoolteacher, Florence Emily Kirby. They had 5 children – Eleanor, John, Charlotte, Lawrence and William. When the economy took a downturn in the 1890s, Carlton decided he needed to find a new career. Several of his brothers-in-law were dentists, and this was a career that looked good to him, so he packed his family up and moved them to Kansas City, where he attended dental school. Carlton P. Fyler became a traveling dentist. Carl could just picture his grandfather in his mind, loading up his buggy with his kit and heading down to Abilene, where he would climb aboard the train. From there, he would ride up and down the rail line, providing dental services for all the citizens of the small towns along the line. Finally, one such town in far western Kansas, LaCrosse, offered him free office space and a bit of land for a house if he would stay and be the town dentist. LaCrosse was a nice little town, and Florence agreed. The couple packed their belongings and moved their family west.

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Son John had his own adventures in settling the west. As a young adult, he took over his brother Lawrence's homestead in Finney County, Kansas. The soft earth and the strong grass made perfect building materials in a nearly treeless land, and so like many of the early settlers, John first lived in a house made of sod bricks, known as a "soddie." Later, he moved to town and went to work in a store called "The Bargain Store."



One day a beautiful young woman came into the store with the Dvorak family, who ranched outside of town. John was immediately taken with her. Upon inquiring, he learned that she was Lyda Dvorak's sister, Helen, from Wisconsin. John knew that she was the girl he wanted to marry. He began to court her, via letter, after she went back to Wisconsin. Eventually, she agreed to be his wife, and came back to Kansas to stay.

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And so the blood flowed down the line until at last, Carl John Fyler was born on May 14, 1921, the firstborn child of John and Helen Fyler. Sister Gloria Amelia would follow in September of 1924.

Carl stirred from his memories when the nurse came in to bring him “dinner,” which consisted of a can of thick milky substance that poured into the tube. He would have much preferred a juicy steak. The tube had plugged up three times already, and they had to take him back over to the hospital and reinsert a different sized tube each time. Carl grimaced as he watched the liquid glug into the tube. Between the problems with the tube and the fact that he could never again eat a decent meal, he had begun to wonder if the whole process was worth it. On top of all that, he had developed a debilitating cough that he couldn’t seem to shake. The coughing spells would come, causing him to hack and choke until he was breathless. Sometimes, even the slightest exertion brought on one of the spells. As the nurse left, he leaned over to pick up the TV remote, which triggered a coughing fit that left him gasping for air. Although his Fyler nature would cause him to fight until the very end, Carl was becoming aware of the fact that the end was indeed near. When he could move again, he used the remote to turn on the television. He flipped through the channels until he came to the History Channel, where he stopped. Carl had always been a student of history. He was fascinated by the stories of the past. He also kept up on all the current events of the day. Except for the time when he had been so ill, his mind was still as sharp as it had ever been, and he intended to keep it that way. He knew he would need his wits for what was about to come.

The History Channel was running a show on the Dust Bowl Era of the 1930s – the dirty thirties, eh? Carl remembered those all too well. He had lived in the middle of that infernal bowl himself. As the announcer droned on, Carl once more drifted back ...

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Spearville was on the high plains of Western Kansas, a semi-arid region in the rain shield of the Rocky Mountains. One could travel for many miles before spotting a tree, and even then it was often a scraggly excuse for one.



When the Indians and the buffalo were there, the grasses held the soil in place. But as the settlers moved in and their plows tore up the grass, conditions began to change. With the grasses gone, there was nothing to hold down the topsoil. The name Kansas means “people of the south wind.” The state had been aptly named. The south and west winds did blow, almost constantly, and soon it was carrying the loose topsoil along with it. Growing drought conditions throughout most of the 1930s only made matters worse.

Carl would never forget the day the first big dust storm rolled into Spearville. It was on April 14, 1935 – Palm Sunday. It grew dark, almost as if a tornado was approaching, but it wasn’t a stormy day. He and Gloria were in the yard when they suddenly became aware of the encroaching darkness. They looked at each other in alarm as the phone

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began to ring inside the house. After a few minutes, Helen came out on the porch. “Carl, Gloria, come into the house,” she said. They followed her in, as the dust enveloped their home. They went from window to window to look out, but they could see nothing but gray from the dust. They tried to listen to the radio, but even it had gone silent. It really seemed like the end of the world. John Fyler finally decided to lead his family into the cellar. There the dust entombed them for over four hours that afternoon, and it was days before the dust settled entirely. But it wasn’t gone. It was in everything, got into every crack. Soon they were eating the dust and sleeping in the dust. It was in their hair and all their clothes. Even the plates inside the cupboards had so much dust on them a person could write their names in it. Carl remembered that his mother would go in a frenzy about all the dust in her house and she would make Gloria help her clean until Gloria cried about how she hated all that dust. And still, it was there. They would no sooner get the house close to clean before another dust roller would hit them again.

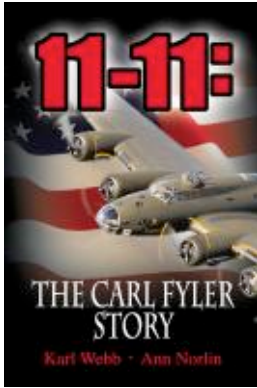
Carl remembered one frightening night when a dust storm rolled in just after his father left the store to come home for dinner. It got so dark that John could not see – a brown blizzard of dust. He felt his way along the edge of the houses, counting houses until he came to his own. They were never so happy when John blew in the door in a cloud of dust, safe. Farmers in Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado and Nebraska took a double hit during the 1930s because in October, 1929, the stock market collapsed. All of a sudden, people became afraid to leave their money in the bank. There was a run on the banks, with frantic people pulling out every cent they had, causing banks to fail all over the country. The collapse triggered a depression the likes of which the country had not seen before. In one year’s time, the unemployment rate in the United States doubled. Many people were out of work, people who had always been gainfully employed and had large families. It was a very difficult time.

The Dust Bowl and the Depression were hard times for the people of Spearville. Their farms were quite literally blowing away and there were no other jobs to be had. Many families packed up and left, hoping

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to find greener fields elsewhere. Because Father was the storeowner, he was able to keep food on the table for his small family. But it was not so for many of their friends and neighbors. Carl knew there were many times his mother had handed part of their supper out the back door to people traveling through, looking for work. Carl recalled seeing their haunted, vacant faces as they looked in the door at their modest house. He wondered at the time what it must feel like to be so hungry you would knock on a stranger's door to beg for food. He would remember those people later, when he was that hungry himself. Carl was also pretty sure, looking back on things, that John Fyler let people buy in the store on credit that he knew they could never repay. Finally the times hit home, and John lost the store. John was a man of great integrity, and he refused to let his debtors come up empty handed. Bit by bit, he paid them all back in full, at times to the detriment of his own family. For this, Helen never really forgave him.

But for Carl and Gloria, things never seemed too bad, especially since John and Helen worked very hard to make their lives as normal as possible.



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