

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/1

The First Secret of Edwin Hoff

by A. B. Bourne

370 pages, \$12.99

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Watch Hill Books

review by Steve Glines

Thumbs up on this one.

It was a gorgeous clear early autumn day when the first page went off just as we were passing the old Boston Garden. Fifty feet later three more pages rattled the phone attached to my belt and a few seconds later a dozen more. I pulled over to see what the commotion was all about. Years earlier I had been appointed to my towns "communications committee" and the fire chief had added me to an emergency pager list. His pages were the only ones I ever received. The first page reported that a plane had hit the World Trade Center, the second that a large plane had hit the world trade center. I didn't look at the rest just then. I remembered seeing clips as a child of the small plane that hit the Empire State building so I just assumed that something like that had happened. We were running late.

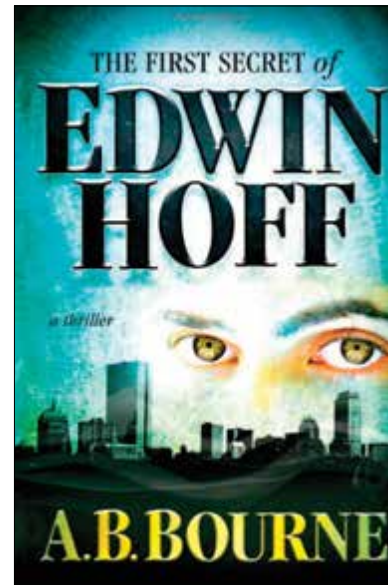
My daughter had a 9:00 A.M. appointment at the Boston U.S. Coast Guard base to take her ships captain's license exam. I dropped her off, turned around and pulled into a parking space to read the rest of the pages that were hammering my phone at the rate of five or six a minute. It was clear that something major was happening. I turned on the radio and called home, "Turn on the TV."

I was just crossing into Cambridge when the radio announced that a second plane hit the second tower. I pulled over again to think. This was clearly a serious terrorist attack. Twenty minutes later as I pulled into my driveway the radio announced that the first tower had collapsed and that another plane had hit The Pentagon.

Just then my daughter called. A slightly panicky voice said, "Dad, they cancelled the exam and have shut down the base, come get me." I drove back to Boston with the radio on. By the time I reached the Coast Guard base the road had been blocked off within a hundred yards of the entrance and enforced by Coastguardsmen in fatigues carrying M-16's.

Later that day I learned that I knew a lot of people aboard that first plane. In one day, on one plane, I lost more friends than in ten years of the Vietnam War. The first I heard about was the father of one of the kids my daughters babysat for. Then, the wife of the owner of the photography store in town, then a friend from the gym and then Danny Lewen.

I first met Danny in the spring of 1997. Danny Lewin was a genuine good guy in a world filled with toads, cheats and pirates (you know who I mean). We both had interests in the dynamic structure of the Internet and



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how to discover its topology. We had both read the same academic papers on the subject and both of us were struggling to come up with a way to solve the bandwidth problem which is, how can a relatively small Internet web server service millions of requests at the same time. We were not alone in this quest. At least a dozen companies had been formed to solve the same problem and there was a considerable body of academic and industrial research on the subject. Throughout the spring, summer and fall, Danny and I corresponded about how to solve the problem. He thought he could best do it one way while I was convinced that my approach was better. In the end he won by being the first to market a viable large scale solution. Towards the end of the year he asked me if I knew how to solve the problem of digesting web server log files from tens of thousand of systems scattered all over the Internet. He hired me. Five months later Danny came to me in private to tell me that they didn't have the cash to make the following weeks payroll. I've learned to never look back at the tens of thousands of shares I walked away from. After all I could have been on that plane with him.

Danny Lewin is Edwin Hoff. Danny/Edwin, before he became a technology guru was an Israeli equivalent of a Navy Seal officer. I could go into how tough he was, or how many ways he could kill someone or the list the weapons he was proficient in but the real Danny was a gentleman in every sense of the word who happened to know how to fight and kill. I never saw that side of him, thank goodness but apparently some of the hijackers on 9/11 did. According to the records Danny sat between two of the hijackers, one was in front of him and another behind him. Danny put up a fight to save the aircraft, but was stabbed by the hijacker behind him according to the 9/11 commission report. This is where reality ends and fiction begins.

The First Secret of Edwin Hoff is a knock down, drag out, action adventure thriller starring Danny Lewin as Edwin Hoff. Akamai/D6 is just Danny/Edwin's playpen, not his day job. He's on the plane because he is on a mission to disarm a vial of Pneumonic Plague that one of the terrorists has duct taped to his body. Crashing the airplane into the World Trade Center is just phase one of the terrorist plot. In Phase two the vial of Pneumonic Plague, which had been designed to survive the impact and fire, was to spray its contents into the air 24 hours after impact when the President of the United States was sure to be there.

Edwin manages to grab the vial just as the hijacking is taking place and fight his way to an exit door where he escapes thanks to a parachute in his carry on backpack. I won't give away the rest of the story but it should suffice to say that a lot of Akamai/D6 employees get involved.

The author inscribed a copy of the book to me thus: "To #12 from #119." It kind of makes me feel like an action adventure hero.