

**Potomac Watch**

# History Buff Stirs Up the FBI



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By  
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IT WAS ALL in a day's work for the FBI, but Broughton Ferguson hasn't recovered from it yet.

Ferguson is a hotel waiter, but what got him in trouble is that he is also a World War II history buff.

He had seen a Readers' Digest article (he thinks it was by Harrison Salisbury) describing the 1941 German invasion of Russia. It was such an unusual account of Operation Barbarossa, so uncomplimentary to Stalin, that Ferguson started wondering what Russian historians had written about the operation.

About three weeks ago, he decided to visit the Russian Embassy to find out.

He didn't get the book he was looking for, although the Russians were very courteous. What he got instead was an alarmed telephone call from his woman friend last week.

She had been visited on her job by an FBI agent who wanted to make a "discreet inquiry" about the person in a photograph he

showed her. It was a picture of Broughton Ferguson walking along 16th Street n.w. outside the Russian Embassy.

She identified Ferguson and wanted to know why the FBI was interested in him. According to Ferguson, the conversation went like this:

"What's he done?"  
"I can't tell you. It's just a routine inquiry."

"For my own protection, I should know before I answer."

"He was seen leaving the Russian Embassy. Can you think of any reason... Can you tell me anything about him or why he would call at the Russian Embassy?"

"I'm sure he didn't go there to blow it up... He reads a lot and looks up reference sources and facts."

"What kind of work does he do?"

"He works as a waiter."  
"Where does he live?"  
(She told him.)

"Sorry to trouble you, and I apologize for upsetting you. It's just a routine inquiry. I just turn this information over to someone else. My only intent is to identify the person in the picture. You may or may not tell Mr. Ferguson of this conversation."

Ferguson, furious when he heard about it, managed to get an appointment with the agent and was told that the

FBI is charged with the security of the country and that "It came to our attention that you had visited the Embassy and we wanted to find out whether you were in a sensitive job."

"If you had been a colonel in the Air Force, for instance, we would have wanted to know why you were there. We found out you aren't, and the matter is closed. Don't worry about it," Ferguson quoted the agent as saying.

But Ferguson worries. The FBI has a permanent file on him and he's afraid of what that might mean.

HE WORRIES about what happens to people when the word gets around that the FBI is checking up on them. What happens if they lose their jobs because of it? Does the FBI care? Why won't they discard their files when the investigation fails to turn up anything untoward?

"I even worry," he said, "about the tax money they waste checking up on every visitor to the Russian Embassy. I wonder how many people they run these checks on."

Probably lots. It is an open secret around town that the FBI maintains camera surveillance of the Embassy from a building across the street.

And if Ferguson's case is at all typical, the guess is that they follow up what their cameras catch.

It may be great for security, but one wonders about the effect on international friendships. Come to think of it, they probably have a file on me. I had lunch with a Russian a couple of years ago.