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By Gene Handsaker

Hollywood, June 2 (AP) — The FBI is checking backgrounds of performers in a television series about itself -- and that's all right with the star.

"To me it's a perfectly normal and proper procedure," says Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.

An FBI spokesman said in Washington today:

"We will not permit anyone with a communist, subversive or substantially derogatory background to portray any part in the series."

The filmed programs will be reviewed for accuracy, he added.

At Warner Bros., here, Zimbalist was between scenes of an episode of "The FBI." The hour-long programs are scheduled to be shown on the American Broadcasting Co. network, starting Sept. 19.

"It seems perfectly logical," he said, "that the FBI, one of whose duties is to be involved with subversives and communists, would want to be portrayed by one."

The FBI spokesman said Warner Bros. "gives us the names of actors hired for the series and the FBI checks the names against its files. Any derogatory information in the files is given to the producers."

The spokesman said he could not say how many names had been submitted to FBI headquarters but that those passed on include Zimbalist.

Zimbalist, 41, son of the concert violinist, played a private eye for seven years on television's "77 Sunset Strip." He recently spent four days in Washington and one at the FBI academy in Quantico, Va., to get the feel of his new role as an FBI agent.

"It was the most interesting week of my life," said Zimbalist. "At the FBI headquarters in Washington, I was shown what the various divisions do -- the laboratory, identification division, files, domestic crime records and so forth. At Quantico I was briefed in defensive tactics and shot a .38 revolver on the skeet range."

The actor also had an interview with FBI director J. Edgar Hoover.

"Mr. Hoover did most of the talking, and it was fascinating," said Zimbalist. "He covered every conceivable subject, flowing over the decades, over the world -- famous figures he had come in contact with, theater personalities, everything under the sun. He is a man of broad interests and great fluency."

In the series Zimbalist plays a Washington-based agent whose adventures -- based on actual FBI cases -- take him all over the country,     Enjoying it ?

"I'm having a ball," he said.

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