



My name is Margit Korporaal, I am 31 years old and have been working as a Police Officer in the Netherlands, for the Rotterdam Unit, Zuidplein Station (South District) for the last ten years. I have been a member of the IPA for almost four years and was lucky to win the ATS Scholarship for 2025. I used the scholarship to attend a three-day course in Sacramento, CA, USA called "*Gang Awareness Update*". I decided for this course as we face similar problems with (youth) gangs, that are often inspired by American or British gangs, in the district i work in.

Before attending the course I was in contact with Detective Sergeant Jason Hernandez from the Gang Unit in Sacramento, who organized the training. Already from the beginning he was very friendly and enthusiastic about my application. Coincidentally, his grandmother was Dutch and had even lived in the same Dutch village as my parents – what a small world!

My plan was as follows: fly to San Francisco to spend the weekend there, recover from my jet lag and do some sightseeing before driving by rental car to Sacramento. There, I stayed from Sunday to Friday, before finally returning to San Francisco for another two nights. After a total of ten days, it was time to return back to the Netherlands.

As usual, during the days before my trip I was arranging all sorts of things at last minute. My dear grandmother lent me her suitcase, which I packed just the last evening before my departure and as always everything worked out fine in the end.

On Thursday, October 2nd, it was finally time to head to America! I woke up full of excitement and flew into San Francisco at around 10 a.m. The flight took about ten hours but was absolutely beautiful! I watched Greenland and its stunning icebergs as we flew overhead. By coincidence, I was seated next to a couple from Sacramento who explained to me the local driving laws for California. Once I landed in San Francisco, I planned to take the public transport to my hostel on Lombard Street in downtown. Well... out of excitement I jumped onto the first "AirTrain" I saw, which turned out to be the wrong one. So after a first full circle around the airport, I finally got on the right AirTrain and arrived at the Samesun hostel in downtown San Francisco. At the hostel, I stayed the first three nights in a shared dorm with three other girls. All three were super friendly, and I became friends with one of the girls, Alma. Together, we spent the entire weekend exploring San Francisco.



What an amazing city it was! On our first evening, we went straight to a stand-up comedy show, where one of the comedians even joked about youth gangs – as if it was meant to be! The rest of the weekend we did some more sightseeing: we walked to the Golden Gate Bridge, visited Pier 39 to see Alcatraz and the sea lions, and went to the Painted Ladies. But honestly, simply walking through the city was already very impressive - with all the beautiful houses and steep streets.

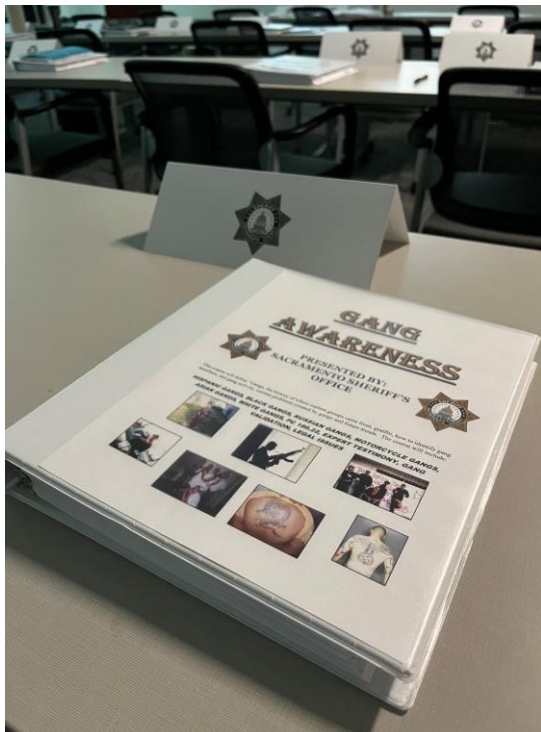
I visited the SFPD Northern District Police Station, where I got a tour from Sergeant Angus Chambers. He even invited me to join him the weekend after Sacramento to explore the city in a patrol car.

On Sunday I picked up my rental car and drove to Sacramento. To help myself for my return to San Francisco, I booked two more nights at the hostel for after Sacramento. That's what I call being on time, right?

I drove my rental car to Sacramento. The drive was about one and a half hours, and I was smiling the whole drive as I enjoyed the beautiful scenery from my oversized car - feeling like a true American. And above all I was incredibly excited for the upcoming week in Sacramento!

There, I stayed in another hostel, this time in a private room. In the evening, Detective Sergeant Jason Hernandez picked me up for dinner. We went to a restaurant and because I was from the Netherlands, he advised me to order a true American hamburger – since, according to him, we don't have real hamburgers in the Netherlands. I laughed because: of course we have hamburgers! We had a great conversation, and he came up with all kinds of interesting ideas for what to do for the evenings after the course. I could tell he was just as enthusiastic as I was about my visit! His ideas sounded amazing and I even started to regret having spent so much time in San Francisco instead of coming to Sacramento sooner. He had never heard of the International Police Association before, but after I told him about the program he became immediately interested and said he wanted to join too.

He was very polite and considerate, holding doors open for me, which I am really not used to from back home. I even told him it really wasn't necessary, but he was just very courteous.



On Monday October 6th, the first class began at 8 a.m. at the Sheriff's station. The first day of class was about *Black Gangs* in the Sacramento area. In the class, there were about twenty students who were all from the Sacramento area, except me. It was interesting to hear what kind of work the others did: some classmates worked in prisons, others were working patrol, like me, and some worked in investigations as detectives. When they heard that I came all the way from the Netherlands for this course, everyone was excited to meet me and I felt very welcome.

The lesson on Black Gangs was particularly interesting as there were many similarities with the gangs we are dealing with in Southern Rotterdam. Part of the course focused on how young people join or are recruited into these gangs. I learned a lot about the local Sacramento gangs, and could even share some of my own knowledge from my work experiences, which everyone was really interested in hearing about. During the break, Detective Aaron Muradyan showed me the building and how their station was set up.

Detective Sergeant Jason Hernandez took me out for lunch and told me what he had planned for me for later that day. He suggested I could join the helicopter unit for a fly-along that evening. Wow - I was super excited and couldn't wait!

The afternoon session was taught by a Sacramento County D.A. (District Attorney). He gave us a lot of tips on what is required from us to build a strong case to get a conviction of a gang member. Even though California's laws differ from Dutch legislation, it was very interesting to hear their strategies. I was still able to see the value of that part of the class and will be able to use that information in my own work back home.



After class, I drove to a small airport in northern Sacramento (McClellan airport) to be there at 5 p.m. to join with the police helicopter crew! There, I met Tactical Flight Officer Kevin Spring and Pilot Joseph Robinson. I was incredibly excited for the opportunity and still couldn't believe this was really happening. After getting all necessary instructions and a safety brief, we took off for a patrol flight.

In the beginning, there weren't many active calls to help with, so Officer Spring and Pilot Robinson showed me the city and its surroundings — I basically got a private aerial city tour. They showed me where the Main Jail was located, the Sacramento Capitol building (also the Capitol of the state of California), Folsom Prison, and even the training academy for the California Highway Patrol where we watched them practicing pursuit driving, which is what my father teaches at the Dutch police. We talked a lot about how we handle things in the Netherlands versus how they are done here in the U.S. — it was super interesting to exchange stories and hear about the differences but also the similarities.

During the fly-along, a radio call came in for an officer requesting backup in downtown, things quickly got serious. The officers had radioed they were dealing with a suspect with a handgun in his waistband. We quickly got overhead the call and the officers were conducting a high-risk stop of a vehicle, similar to what is called a *BTGP* in the Netherlands. As we orbited overhead, multiple police cars arrived quickly with their emergency lights on. It was amazing to watch the arrest from above and see how the ground officers coordinated with the helicopter. I could witness the scene through the window and also on the computer screen that Officer Spring uses to utilize the camera equipment - the camera quality and zoom capabilities were incredibly sharp.

Later we assisted with several other incidents. However, the most shocking call came just before we were about to return to the airport. A medical transport helicopter had crashed onto Highway 50 shortly after their take-off from UC Davis Medical Center. At first I wasn't even sure I heard correctly, but soon it became clear it was serious. We flew over the scene with dozens of police cars with their emergency lights activated and a huge traffic jam below us. Out the window and on Officer Spring's screen, I could see the wreckage of the helicopter. After a tense few minutes, we learned that miraculously everyone involved, even the helicopter crew, was alive at the time and would be transported to the hospital. After a few minutes overhead, we flew back to McClellan airport.

At the end of the night I was driving back to the hostel and I couldn't stop smiling. I still couldn't believe how incredible my day had been and I was already looking forward to the rest of the week.



On Tuesday, the morning session was about *Hispanic Gangs*. Even though we don't encounter this type of gangs in the Netherlands, issues like cocaine import are very familiar, making the session very relatable and useful. My classmates got increasingly curious about how things worked in Rotterdam, gangs we are dealing with and our police work in general. During every break someone came up asking questions. It was great to see genuine interest in our way of working and the exchange coming along with it.

For lunch, Detectives Terrence McDonald and Nathaniel Davis, along with four other classmates and I went to In-N-Out Burger. They proudly claimed it was *the* burger place of California. No offense, but while it was tasty, it felt more like a "McDonald's Plus" than a proper restaurant ;) One thing I had already noticed: in America everything is bigger than in the Netherlands — food, everyday stuff, weapons, etc. Detective McDonald, just like Sergeant Hernandez, kept holding doors open for me — those Americans sure know how to leave a good impression!

The afternoon class was about *Asian Gangs*, which again turned out to be very interesting and relevant. It was interesting to hear how each type of gang operates differently, while certain criminal patterns still remain similar.



After class the Sergeant had again arranged an evening ride along for me from 4 to 9 p.m. I was to ride along with the Gang Suppression Unit while on patrol. We drove around in an unmarked vehicle with three Gang Unit detectives —Detective Gabriel Rodriguez, Detective Pejman Zarrin, and Detective Terrence McDonald.

During their shift, they were pulling over one vehicle after another. I could see many similarities between the citizens' behavior and the officers' methods in Sacramento compared to ours in South Rotterdam.

Between traffic stops, we discussed various work methods and systems — in my opinion, it seemed like we handle some situations better in the Netherlands, but for some instances it seemed that California police handled it better. With all this exchange of knowledge the value of this scholarship again became evident - we were learning a lot from one another!

Later during that shift, we went to a small taco stand on a street corner — honestly the best taco of my life!

Wednesday was the last day of the course. The morning session was about *Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*. A problem we do also see (or used to see) in the Netherlands. Several years ago there were changes to Dutch legislation which made it to where motorcycle gangs are completely banned. Unfortunately, although they are not as common, some still remain. The class was still very interesting. The Lieutenant who taught the class clearly knew what he was talking about and had some interesting stories. Later, we were shown many different motorcycle jackets ("cuts"), all confiscated from gang members.

The afternoon session was our final class: The topic was about *White Supremacists*. It was weird to sit in a class on the other side of the world and hear a lecture about Nazis, a problem we know very well from back home in Europe.

After class it was time to say goodbye to my classmates. In the evening I joined the Gang Suppression Unit again — this time riding along with Sergeant Hernandez. The team was out doing vehicle stops and searching people. Whenever they found something, Sergeant Hernandez was called in for supervision.

During the first part of the shift, I was shown the Main Jail in downtown Sacramento. Again, it was very strange to see how things are different here compared to the Netherlands. For me, sometimes it felt like I was in an American movie. It was unusual to see the inmates all wearing orange jumpsuits and moving around handcuffed together in groups when being moved to other facilities. The cell blocks were divided by gang affiliation to prevent incidents of violence between inmates. It seemed that most serious offenders were brought directly to the county jail even after a major incident, instead of being held in a police station cell.



After visiting the jail, Sergeant Hernandez showed me one of Sacramento's police stations. While being shown the police station, a call came in: the Gang Suppression Unit detectives had found an illegally possessed and loaded firearm during a vehicle stop. Again, it was interesting to see how differently things were handled compared to in Rotterdam. Especially after confiscation of the gun the person was advised to buy a *legal* firearm next time.

That evening, I had my last dinner together with the Gang Unit. We went to a restaurant in downtown Sacramento and had a great evening - I felt truly welcome by everyone. During dinner we discussed different systems and tools used in the Netherlands and the U.S. Again, it became clear how much we could learn from each other. I hope that some of them will visit Rotterdam someday to continue exchanging ideas.

The next day, the official part of my trip was over, and it was time again to explore some other places around Sacramento. I had continued to talk with Officer Spring since the fly-along, and he offered to take me over to Lake Tahoe. Once we made it to the lake, it was absolutely stunning — crystal clear blue water. Even though it was ice-cold, I still jumped in - who knows if I'll ever get the chance again! ;)



Again we talked about police work in the U.S. versus the Netherlands. I was surprised when he was shocked about us being allowed to fire a warning shot into the air - something that is absolutely forbidden in the U.S. In the evening, we met up with Officer Joseph Robinson and his family for dinner at a nice brewery.

On Friday morning, I stopped by the Sergeant one last time at the Sheriff's Office, County Investigations, to talk about a few projects we run in Rotterdam-South to combat (youth) crime. He assured me once again that he would make an effort to come over to the Netherlands to see how these projects could be implemented in Sacramento as well. Finally, it was time to say goodbye.

Now, as I sit here on the plane back to the Netherlands, I can look back on an incredible experience. I got far more from it than I ever expected — not only did I learn valuable things I can apply in my own work and share with my colleagues, but I also met amazing, inspiring people with whom I'll definitely stay in touch.

Everything I've seen and been able to experience here has far exceeded my expectations. It was a wonderful trip, and I'm deeply grateful to the IPA for making this possible.

