

Arthur Troop Scholarship

In January 2024 I was astonished to learn that I had been awarded the Arthur Troop Scholarship (ATS) for 2024. I knew that it was a prestigious honour granted to few and wasted no time in making arrangements to utilise it.

In my current Investigator role I wanted to participate in a course that I was not only interested in but would also help me in my duties. I did my research and found the International Homicide Investigators Association was hosting a Homicide Investigation Course in Houston Texas in May. The course was aimed at providing Detectives with a working knowledge of the latest in investigational techniques being utilised by police in the United States.

After speaking to my long-time colleague and recently joined IPA member, Courtney, she felt that the opportunity was one that she too would like to participate in to see how far the friendship of the IPA extended.

I reached out to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Houston Police Department (HPD) to organise visits. Both organisations graciously volunteered their time and resources to ensure that I made the most of my visit to Houston.

On Sunday 5th May 2024 we commenced our journey from Adelaide to Houston via Melbourne and Auckland. After 18 hrs 50 mins of flight time we arrived at our destination jetlagged but cheerful.

Mon 06/05

FBI Houston Field Office

We were greeted at the front gates by the welcoming committee including Assistant Special Agent in Charge David Martinez who explained the FBI Houston Field Office's area of responsibility and how it worked with its law enforcement partners worldwide.

Special Agent Alexander Simms gave us a run down as to how the Bureau responds to Domestic Terrorism. Special Agent Tomas Ortiz spoke to us about Genealogy and how Agencies looking to help the public identify their family tree have also been assisting in identifying victims and perpetrators of violent crimes solving cases from as far back as the 1980s.

Special Agent John Shimp from Violent Crime delivered a presentation about the FBI's methodology in catching a gang of Cash in Transit robbers who had killed two armour guards in two coordinated robberies.

Mon 06/05 - Photos - FBI Houston Field Office

Outside FBI Field Office Houston



Meeting with Assistant Special Agent in Charge, David Martinez



Tue 07/05

FBI Houston Field Office & National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)

After a breakfast meeting with FBI personnel and presentation by Special Agent Connor Hagan, public relations officer, we were taken to the Johnson Space Center.

We met with Special Agent David Davenport who is an FBI agent based at the Space Center working in Counter-Intelligence. His job is primarily to educate staff in counter espionage so that they can identify potential approaches from foreign governments. On arrival we were handed special badges with the words 'Director's Guests' printed on the front and given a VIP behind the scenes tour unavailable to the public. This tour is usually given to Foreign Dignitaries so we were very appreciative for the opportunity. We were shown the life size replica of the International Space Station (ISS) and explained that if anything malfunctioned on the real ISS the problem would be reported to NASA. The technicians working at NASA would then replicate the problem on the ground and find the way to correct it here after which they'd provide detailed instructions to astronauts on the ISS about how to fix it.

We were taken to see the inside of the Mission Control Centre for the 1969 moon landing. This was located on the 3rd floor of the Christopher C. Kraft, Jr building. After the moon landing the Johnson Space Center was declared a National Historic Landmark as designated by the United States Department of the Interior. As such the 3rd floor has been kept as it was back in 1969 and Mission Control is only viewable from behind glass to ensure it is kept for generations to come.

We visited the NASA Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory which is the world's largest indoor pool. This pool contains a life-size replica of the ISS underwater so that astronauts can practice extravehicular activity such as repairs to the outside of the ISS.

Tue 07/05 - Photos

Director's Guest passes



Standing next to Astronaut Spacesuits



Mission Control Center – 3rd Floor



Reusable spacecraft – Boeing Starliner



Wed 08/05

Houston Police Department – Police Academy & Police Memorial

We were picked up at 0730 by Senior Officer Luke Pham who took us out for breakfast tacos on the way to the Houston Police Academy. We were met by Academy staff who graciously took time out of their day to show us through what their training is like. We witnessed soon to be graduated cadets going through their final assessments being confronted with role players as criminals in dangerous situations. We then moved on to the advanced driver training instructors who took us through their precision driving and high speed courses.

We then went on to the Fertitta Tactical Training Center where we were walked through an indoor village including streets, houses, banks, convenience stores, hotels and even a school. All of these were set up to allow officers to train for real world scenarios that they may face in the near future including responding to robberies, domestic abuse incidents and active school shooters.

Following this we were taken to the live fire indoor and outdoor ranges where we spoke to staff and cadets about their firearms training. It was fascinating to find that training for firearms was standardised to a national standard with the qualification shoot being identical to our own.

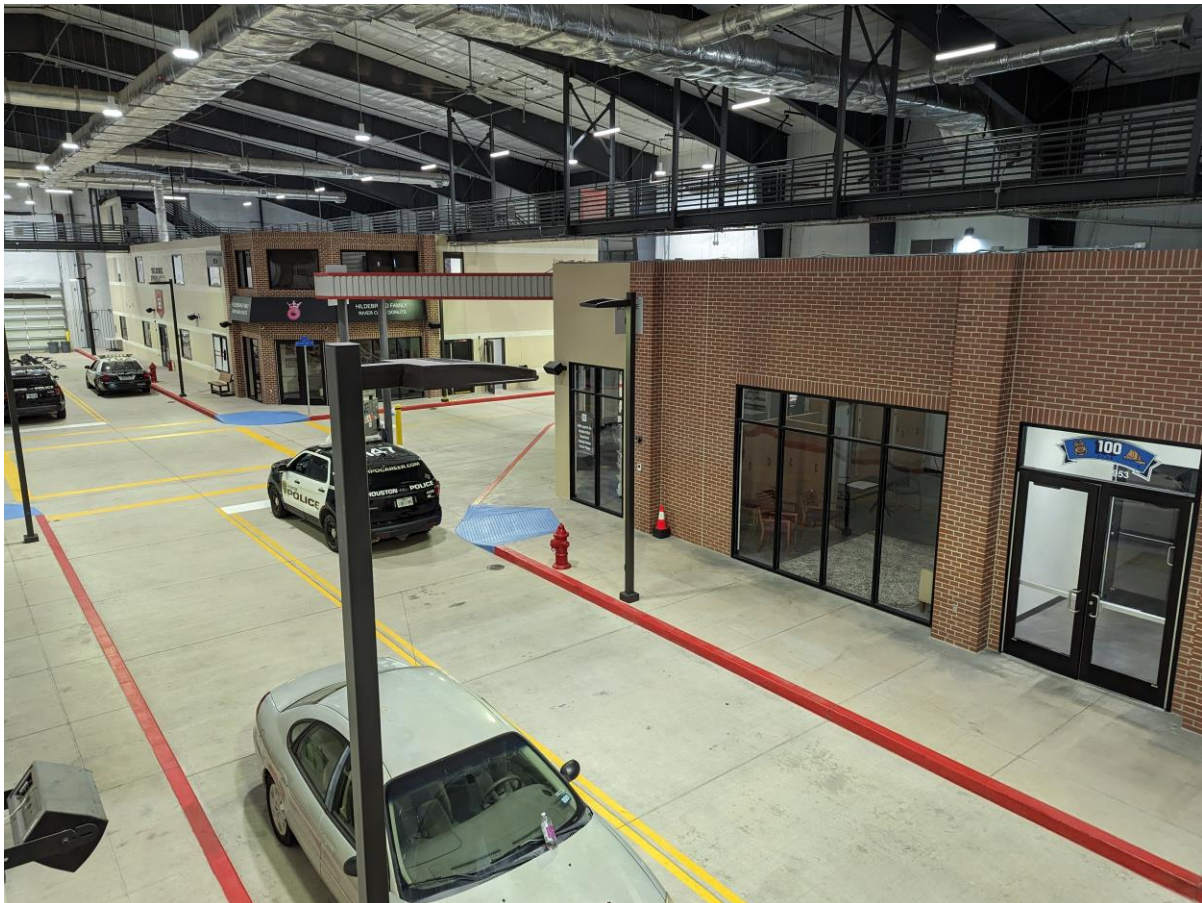
At the end of our time at the academy we were taken to the Houston Police Memorial which had the city of Houston in the background. These sacred grounds, and the monument that rests on top of it, are strategically located to represent the fallen Officers of the Houston Police force and how they still stand watch over their city even in their death. The monument has a police officer stationed there 24/7 in order to ensure that the appropriate respect is paid by visitors to this memorial.

Wed 08/05 - Photos

Houston Police Department - Pursuit Class Vehicle



Police Academy – Indoor Training Facility



Police Academy – Indoor Training Facility



Houston Police Memorial



Thu 09/05

Houston Police Department – SWAT and Bomb Response

After a 0900 hrs pick up by Senior Officer Pham we were taken to visit the SWAT, Bomb Response Unit, Water Police and Police Negotiators. After a brief presentation about what each section did we were taken on a tour of their facilities. Bomb Response demonstrated the use of their robot 'Spot' which was developed by Boston Dynamics. This robot is able to be used to assist in search and rescue as well as high risk situations where criminals are held up in a stronghold. The robot dog is able to climb stairs, open doors and even release a canister of CS gas to entice compliance by criminals. Spot is fitted out with 360 degree cameras, thermal imaging, infrared, torches for low light, microphones and speakers. Houston SWAT had a modified Bobcat which had been termed the Rook by law enforcement. The Rook is fitted out with bulletproof glass and thick metal to protect all vulnerable areas. It is able to assist with barricade situations where dangerous individuals are held up inside a premises by tearing holes into walls.

At the end of the tour we were taken to a shooting range to partake in the American pastime of shooting. We were provided with a number of firearms including a 9mm handgun, a .22 semi automatic rifle and an AR-15.

Thu 09/05 – Photos

Spot – Bomb Response Robot Dog



The Rook – SWAT's Bulletproof Bulldozer



SWAT Armoured Vehicle



SWAT Officer's Vehicle – equipped to respond from home



Firing AR-15 at indoor range



Fri 10/05

Houston Police Department – Homicide and Police Headquarters

Picked up at 0830 by Homicide Detective Chris Cegielski. We were taken to visit the Homicide Division and introduced to all members in the office. We were shown a case study about a murder solved through the use of cellular data analysis, interrogation and tenacity. This ultimately led to the conviction of two persons charged with Capital Murder (punishable by the death penalty).

After the presentation we were taken out for lunch where we sat with 12 homicide detectives to talk shop and compare investigational techniques used between both police departments. During lunch there was a report of a suspicious death and so we were taken to attend a scene nearby in an observatory capacity.

After the scene we were taken to Police Headquarters where we attended the Houston Police Museum. There we saw Memorial Wall which had the Badge of each officer who had died in the line of duty mounted. Amazing Grace was electronically played on the bagpipes in memory of these Officers and their sacrifice.

We went upstairs at Police Headquarters and met with Larry Satterwhite Chief of Police and Executive Assistant Chief Ban Tien. Both posed a series of questions about policing in Australia so that they could find ways to improve their processes in Houston PD. They were both impressed with SAPOL's recent collection of CCTV via uploading to a secure server rather than collection of CCTV via USB or disc. We then posed questions about policing in Houston and learned that we are facing the same issues in Australia that they are in Houston. We ended the meeting with a patch and coin swap followed by a photo opportunity.

Friday 10/05 – Photos

Badges of our fallen Officers



Meeting with Chief of Police



Meeting with Chief of Police



Sat 11/05

Houston Police Department – Ride Along

At about 9.00 pm we were collected in black Chevy Suburban after which we commenced our ride along. Sergeant Simon and Sergeant Heaven were our tour guides for the evening and they explained that they had permission to be on the city wide channel which gave them access to all areas.

We were driven to the Fusion Centre which houses Special Investigations Unit and dispatch. We were taken to level 3 where dispatch was held and were amazed at the sheer size of the dispatch floor. It immediately reminded me of a convention centre and features hundreds of computers, large screens and clocks with different time zones displayed. The dispatch was separated into three areas, one side was for Houston Police Department dispatchers, the middle was for 911 call takers and the far side was for Houston Fire Department (which in Houston incorporates the Ambulance service). After walking the floor and meeting dispatchers we heard a report of shots fired at a nearby intersection. We got straight into the car and responded to the call. Upon arrival at the intersection we found marked patrols already on scene with crime scene tape up. A crashed vehicle was in the middle of the intersection and traffic had been diverted around. We got out of the car and met the 'Primary Officer' who briefed us on the circumstances of the shooting. Witnesses saw two vehicles collide and both drivers exited their vehicles. A verbal argument started and both drivers pulled out firearms and shot one another. A third male who stood 20 metres away was also shot during the incident. All had been taken by ambulance to the hospital. After crime scene investigators and detectives arrived on scene we left for another shooting.

The second shooting we attended occurred in the carpark of a convenience store. Witnessed stated that they saw the male victim fuelling up his vehicle when he became involved in a verbal altercation with another male at an ATM. The male at the ATM then approached the victim and shot him where he stood. The victim died at the scene and could not be revived. Crime scene arrived and began to process the scene after which time we left.

The third shooting we attended occurred at a block of townhouses. This report came in to police from the ShotSpotter Pilot Program that detects and locates gunfire through mounted listening devices in several spots throughout Houston. The technology uses an array of acoustic sensors in an area and listens for gunshots. Once detected an alert is sent to law enforcement. This technology has assisted Houston Police Department identify shooting hotspots and allocate police to areas of high gun violence in an effort to reduce crime. We arrived on scene to find it had been secured by uniformed members. We found a deceased male with a single gunshot wound in his chest laying next to his semi-automatic pistol. An initial investigation revealed that the deceased had ordered a pizza from and when the pizza delivery employee attended the deceased tried to rob him at gunpoint. The driver drew his own gun and shot the would-be robber dead before driving away. In Houston this is considered to be a justified homicide in self-defence.

At the end of our night we were left stunned by the number of deaths as a direct result of gun violence. Our guides explained that this was an average Saturday nightshift and that on long weekends and public holidays numbers can be significantly higher than this. It was explained to us that even if a gun is illegally obtained or the person using the gun in self-defence is not licenced they

still have a right to defend themselves with the firearm and would not face additional charges for doing so.

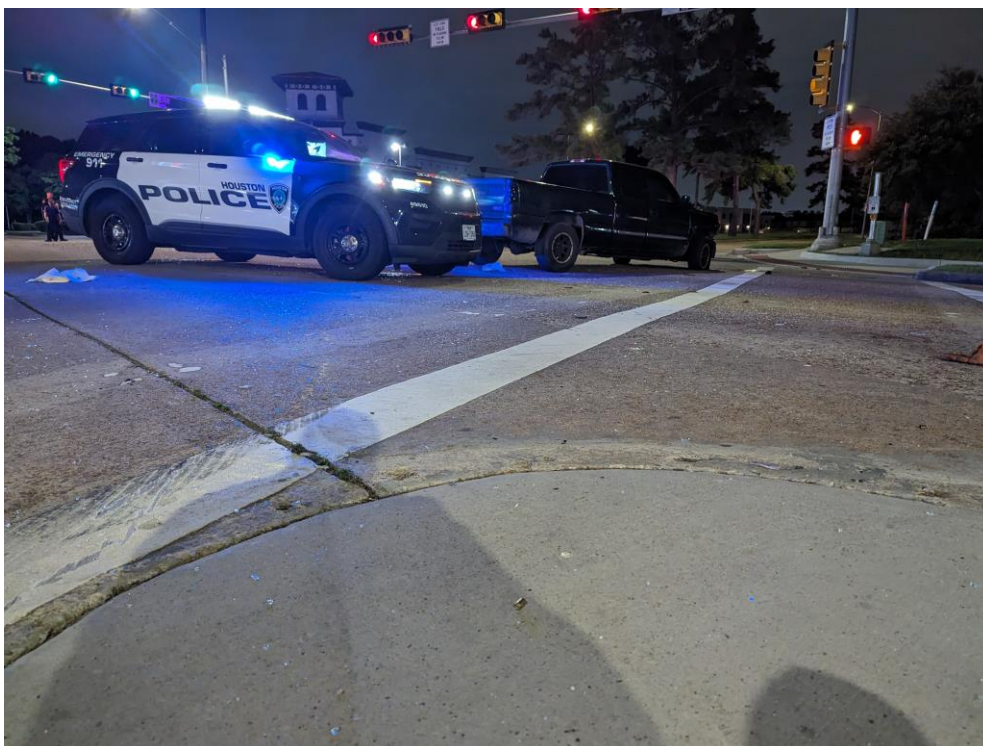
On average 400 firearms were stolen from locked vehicles in Houston each month in 2023 with a 20% increase in this number in 2024. These stolen firearms make their ways onto the street and into the hands of prohibited persons such as convicted felons and gang members. They're being discovered in crime scenes not just in Texas but in other states.

Saturday 11/05 – Photos

Fusion Center – 911 call triage



On-scene of our first shooting for the night (bullet casings bottom middle)



Sunday 12/05/2024

Montgomery County – Big As Texas Music Festival

On our first and only day off here we decided to make the most of it and see what Texas had to offer. We found that in Montgomery County, about 1 hour from where we were staying, the 'Big As Texas' music festival was on and decided to partake. We saw our fair share of cowboy hats, cowboy boots, smoked meats and Texan market stalls. We enjoyed country music by some big names such as Morgan Wade, Dierks Bentley, Anne Wilson, 49 Winchester and Kate Watson. Despite the lousy weather there was an amazing turn out of fans of country music who came from far and wide. While waiting for an Uber to collect us we met with Corporal Frank McIntyre from the County's K9 Unit and exchanged views on country policing and metro policing.

Sun 12/05 – photos



Corporal Frank McIntyre – K9 Unit



Monday 13/05/2024 – Friday 17/05/2024

Foundational Homicide Investigators Course

The Foundational Homicide Investigators Course ran for 5 consecutive days with a myriad of experts in their field talking about their work. The course covered off many areas including Responsibilities of Homicide Investigators, Investigative Considerations, Crime Scene Preservation, Evidence Processing, Suspect Development, Interview Techniques, Exploitation of Digital Evidence, Cellular Analysis, Investigative Resources and Courtroom Testimony.

Apart from us, affectionately dubbed the 'Australian Delegation', the course was mostly attended by Texas law enforcement and officers from interstate. During breaks we traded Law Enforcement Challenge Coins and Patches as is the tradition amongst officers. We met with all manner of law enforcement from Constables to Sheriff's Deputies to the famous Texas Rangers (who did not take off their signature white hats for the duration of the course). The various Law Enforcement Officers all had varying roles in their jurisdiction. Some were from large agencies and others were from small 6 person stations. We all swapped stories and investigational techniques. I firmly believe that we jointly learnt as much from each other during breaks as we did during the delivery of presentations of case studies. We also have friends from all across the USA in multiple different agencies should an investigation ever lead to America.

Before we knew it the final day had wrapped up, we received our course graduation certificates and it was time for everyone to return to their places of duty. We got on the plane (with luggage significantly heavier than when we left for Houston) and headed home to impart the knowledge we had gained to our colleagues.

Monday 13/05/2024 – Friday 17/05/2024 – Photos

Course Photo



Throughout the entire time in Houston Texas one thing was clear, the hospitality and friendship through service knows no bounds. While vastly different we are more alike than unlike. We share an unspoken bond with those in the policing fraternity through the experiences we have had a world apart. We have all worn the uniform and put ourselves at risk to ensure strangers do not come to harm. Every Law Enforcement Officer we met went to extreme lengths to share their experiences and learnings with us expecting nothing in return. I hope to someday return the favour to these officers and other officers like them so that they too can experience the true feeling of friendship that I was greeted with every step along the way.

I would encourage all eligible members of the International Police Association to apply for the Arthur Troop Scholarship as it has provided me the opportunity of a lifetime during which I've made new friends and shared new experiences.