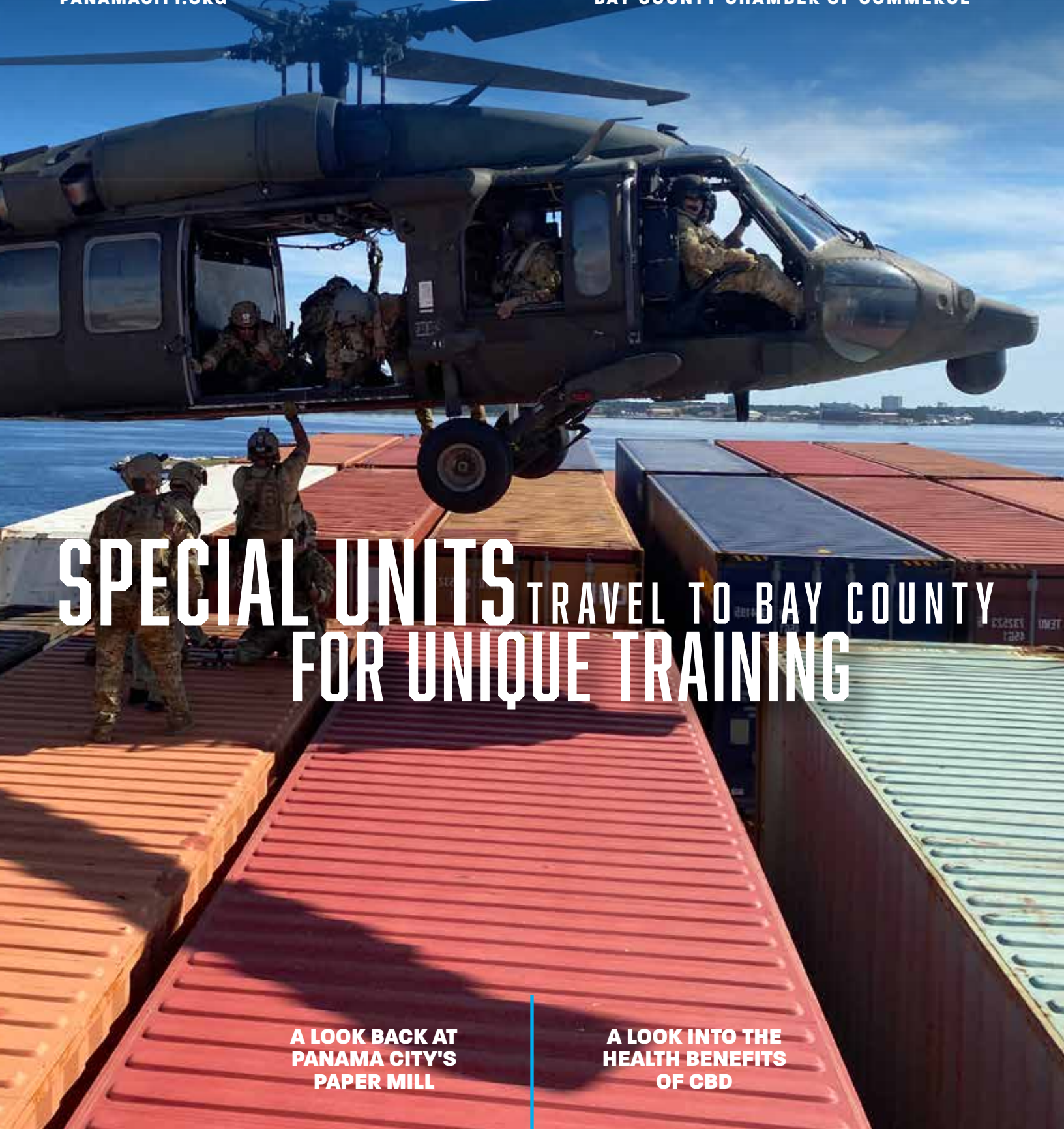


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SPECIAL UNITS TRAVEL TO BAY COUNTY FOR UNIQUE TRAINING

A LOOK BACK AT
PANAMA CITY'S
PAPER MILL

A LOOK INTO THE
HEALTH BENEFITS
OF CBD



MARITIME SPECIAL WARFARE ANNEX

BRINGS UNIQUE TRAINING TO BAY COUNTY CONTRIBUTED BY ASYMMETRIC SOLUTIONS

At 2 a.m. on a moonless night, a three-hundred-foot container ship departed Panama City and ran at full speed through empty, choppy seas trying to make as good a time as possible. The captain sat back with his paper; his crew settled in for what should be an unremarkable voyage.

All were unaware of the small rigid boats rapidly closing distance on their vessel. The agile craft pulled alongside, plunging up and down in the big ship's wake. One of the occupants quickly extended a pole with a narrow ladder of aluminum and cable and hooked it onto the rail of the lurching ship. The moment it connected, a dozen heavily armed men raced up the rungs and spilled onto the ship. They split into two groups, moving to the bridge and engine room with focused intent. The lead group burst onto the bridge with such ferocity the captain fell from his chair. A crewman reached for a pistol sitting under the chart table and was instantly shot dead. In the engine room, the second group had the remaining crew kneeling in a line, hands zip tied behind their backs. One of the assaulters took the wheel, throttled back, and turned the ship in an unscheduled direction.

Since the fall of last year these attacks have been a regular occurrence off the coastline of Panama City Beach. No, there isn't a new wave of marauding pirates. It's American Special Operations Forces undergoing Vessel Board Search and Seizure (VBSS)

training. Navy SEALs, Marine MARSOC Raiders, Army Special Forces, and other specialized units from military installations all over the country travel to Panama City to participate in these highly realistic scenario-based training events developed and run by a defense industry contractor, Asymmetric Solutions.

Headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri, Asymmetric Solutions recently added its Maritime Special Warfare Annex in Panama City Beach to work in conjunction with its 400-acre facility in Perry. The company's staff is composed of highly decorated combat veterans from the specialized units it now privately serves: SEALs, Raiders, Green Berets, Delta Force, CIA Officers, and others. Using the experience of that staff and its own diminutive private navy, the Panama City Maritime Special Warfare Annex works to ready water bound warriors to get on and seize large and small ships from the open sea.

"We use a crawl, walk, run methodology," explained Birm, a former Force Reconnaissance Marine, MARSOC Raider, and the Director of Asymmetric Solutions' Florida Operations. "We begin with a static mockup on the ground in Perry, then move to the real ship sitting still at port, then slow-moving assaults of the ship underway in the daylight, and finally moving at full speed using NODs (night vision goggles)."



The assaults are launched both from Blackhawk Helicopters and 12-meter highly powered rigid inflatable boats.

"We work to cover all scenarios and conditions," said Steven, a former Navy SEAL, and ship takedown expert who participated in multiple seizures of commercial vessels attempting to run Naval blockades in the early days of the Iraq conflict. "Bad guy stuff still happens at night and in rough seas. American special operations forces will be ready for them."

READINESS IS THE KEY TERM FOR ASYMMETRIC SOLUTIONS OFFERINGS.

"There isn't much that prepares you for crawling 20 feet up a flexible ladder on the side of a bouncing ship with 40 pounds of gear on your body," Birm noted.

"The wind and the water of course doesn't make it any easier. The idea is learning and gaining a relative comfort level through constant immersion while making the variables as close to the actual event as possible. These aren't events anyone wants to enter with a lack of confidence or surety of their execution."

Asked why they picked Panama City as a location; the answer from Asymmetric's Chief Operating Officer Keith Waldrop was multi-faceted. "Panama City was ideal, a large international port and close proximity to our Perry facility," Waldrop said.

"Moreover, Panama City has a long history of military training and an evident sense of red, white, and blue support for the country and military. We have been very welcomed here by the people and local businesses who seem to bend over backwards to assist us in our mission of getting the next generation of warfighters ready."

And getting those warfighters ready has very real and very current relevance. Vessel Boarding, while always a skill maintained by elements of special operations units, is now at the forefront of necessary skills as the Department of Defense moves its primary posture from counter terrorism to what is termed "Near Peer" conflict or potential engagement with belligerents who have far more developed nation sponsored military technology and capability. The recent conflict in Ukraine is an illustration of this and while U.S. Forces are not currently known to be directly involved, use of American Special Operations forces to seize commercial ships attempting to circumvent sanctions wouldn't be out of the question.

Waldrop, a former Force Reconnaissance Marine and MARSOC Raider with a top tier MBA to his name, seemed to suggest that future development of Asymmetric Solutions wasn't done adding its footprint to the Panama City area.

"We have been really pleased with the environment and ease of use but more than anything the backing of the people and local businesses. The only consistent thing about special operations readiness needs is they are always changing. When new requirements arise, we will quickly move to meet them and that capability and infrastructure will land where we know we are welcome."