



An HIMARS Inside the MC-130J: New Mobility for U.S. Special Forces

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U.S. Air Force Special Operations are refining the capability to rapidly transport personnel, equipment, and firepower even from advanced bases and in areas where normal airport infrastructure may not be available.

During the **Northern Strike 26-2** exercise, the **Air Commandos of the 1st Special Operations Wing** operated with **MC-130J Commando II** aircraft alongside units from the U.S. Army, Marines, and National Guard, experimenting with missions ranging from in-flight refueling to airdrops, up to rapid loading and unloading of **M142 HIMARS** rocket launcher systems.

The 1st SOW participated in the exercise from **August 1 to 13** at the **National All-Domain Warfighting Center in Michigan**, focusing particularly on the capability to generate specialized air power from an advanced position and on interoperability between the various components of the U.S. Armed Forces.

An HIMARS Inside an MC-130J

One of the most significant images from Northern Strike 26-2 shows an **M142 HIMARS from the 182nd Field Artillery Regiment of the Michigan Army National Guard being loaded inside an MC-130J Commando II** of the 1st Special Operations Wing.

The activity took place on **August 4 in Alpena**, Michigan, and aimed to refine procedures for the rapid insertion of heavy weapon systems.

According to the official U.S. Air Force description, this type of training enables the Joint Force to develop the capability to **rapidly move precision firepower to unpredictable locations**, reducing dependence on large traditional air bases.

The MC-130J naturally does not become a launch platform for the HIMARS: the concept is to use the special operations aviation transport capability to rapidly bring the rocket launcher and its crew to an advanced area, enable employment of the system, and when necessary, reposition it.

It is a philosophy that focuses especially on **mobility, unpredictability, and rapid dispersal**.

Three Complete Loading and Unloading Cycles

The presence of the HIMARS was not merely a photographic exercise.

During their participation in Northern Strike, the 1st SOW crews completed **three cycles of loading and unloading the HIMARS**, incorporating this capability into a much broader training program.

The MC-130J aircraft also conducted in-flight refuelings with the **Marines' MV-22B Osprey**, formation flights with KC-130J tankers, airdrops of Humvees, and support for parachute operations in both **military free-fall** and with **automatic-opening parachutes**.

These are missions that directly reflect the role of the MC-130J Commando II: delivering personnel and materiel where the use of normal air transport capabilities may become more difficult.

Operating Away from Large Bases

Another important element of the exercise involved logistics.

Maintenance personnel from the 1st Special Operations Wing worked with **limited tools and spare parts**, simulating the difficulties that Air Commandos might encounter operating away from their usual infrastructure.

The goal is to continue generating missions even when the availability of large air bases cannot be taken for granted.

It is an increasingly important principle in modern scenarios: airports, depots, and large military installations constitute relatively easy targets to locate and can be threatened by long-range missiles and unmanned systems.

The ability to **disperse personnel, aircraft, and weapon systems**, moving them rapidly between different locations, thus increases survival chances and greatly complicates the adversary's task.

From Special Forces to Long-Range Artillery

And it is precisely the integration between **special operations aviation and ground artillery** that makes the experimentation particularly interesting.

An HIMARS is designed to move rapidly on its own, but air transport allows it to overcome distances, geographic obstacles, or areas not reachable quickly enough by ground.

The U.S. Air Force describes this capability as a way to enable joint forces to **bypass traditional airports and bring precision firepower to areas where conventional forces might have greater difficulty operating**.

Northern Strike 26-2 thus demonstrates an increasingly evident trend in the U.S. Armed Forces: no longer considering aviation, artillery, Special Forces, and ground components separately, but building a network capable of rapidly moving sensors, personnel, and weapon systems across the battlefield.

For the **Air Commandos**, specialized mobility, airdrops, and refueling remain fundamental capabilities. The difference is that today what is being transported can also be a system capable of delivering **precision fire at long distance** just minutes after its arrival on the ground.

Source: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/9873223/1st-sow-michigan-army-national-guard-load-himars-during-northern-strike-26-2>

Photo: <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/572675/1-sow-sharpens-joint-readiness-northern-strike-26-2>