

U.S. Soldier Becomes First To Plan And Execute Autonomous Black Hawk Missions Using MATRIX™ Technology At Northern Strike 25-2



U.S. Army National Guard Sgt. uses a tablet to command the Sikorsky OPV Black Hawk to autonomously transport a 2,900-pound water buffalo sling load for the first time during Northern Strike in Michigan. Photo courtesy Sikorsky, a Lockheed Martin company.

CAMP GRAYLING, Mich., October 30, 2025— For the first time, a U.S. soldier—not a trained aviator—planned and executed real-world missions in military exercises with Lockheed Martin Sikorsky's [NYSE: LMT] Optionally Piloted (OPV) Black Hawk helicopter, powered by [MATRIX™ technology](#).

In partnership with the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), Sikorsky fielded the OPV Black Hawk aircraft at [Northern Strike 25-2](#) in August to demonstrate, in an operational environment, how an autonomous Black Hawk can expand mission reach and reduce risk to soldiers.

A U.S. Army National Guard Sergeant First Class, trained in less than an hour became the first soldier to independently plan, command and execute OPV Black Hawk missions using the system's handheld tablet. He directed the payload to a location 70 nautical miles away and commanded multiple precision airborne drops, marking the first time OPV Black Hawk operated fully under the control of an actual warfighter, instead of a trained test pilot or engineer.

That wasn't the only first of the exercise.

At Northern Strike, OPV Black Hawk demonstrated three types of cargo delivery, including internal carry, external sling load and precision parachute drop, as well as a MEDEVAC exercise.

Firsts in Flight

- **Exercise 1: Parachute Drops and Logistics Recovery**

- From a Coast Guard boat on Lake Huron, a soldier planned and executed a Class 1 resupply mission from 70 nautical miles away. After the cargo was unloaded, he used the tablet interface to direct the OPV Black Hawk in racetrack patterns over the lake while soldiers onboard completed two precision parachute drops at different altitudes. It was the first time the OPV Black Hawk performed precision logistics and airborne drops entirely under soldier control.

- **Exercise 2: Water Buffalo External Sling Load**

- OPV Black Hawk completed its first-ever autonomous hookup of an external load while airborne. Using its hover stability capabilities, the aircraft held position while soldiers quickly and efficiently attached a 2,900-pound water tank without pilot intervention. The demonstration showed that a MATRIX-equipped aircraft can perform complex aerial resupply missions in the field.

- **Exercise 3: HIMARS External Sling Load and MEDEVAC Recovery**

- OPV Black Hawk completed six autonomous hovering hookups to transport HIMARS launch tubes to an alternate landing zone. A soldier then used OPV Black Hawk to conduct a simulated personnel recovery, including a tail-to-tail patient transfer to a piloted Black Hawk at an unimproved landing site. This was the first time an untrained soldier commanded an autonomous MEDEVAC recovery from inside the OPV Black Hawk aircraft.

"With lives on the line, Sikorsky's MATRIX flight autonomy system can transform how military operators perform their missions," said Rich Benton, vice president and general manager of Sikorsky, a Lockheed Martin company. "An optionally piloted Black Hawk aircraft can reduce pilot workload in a challenging environment or complete a resupply mission without humans on board. In contested logistics situations, a Black Hawk operating as a large drone offers commanders greater resilience and flexibility to get resources to the point of need."

MATRIX technology, leveraged to support DARPA's Aircrew Labor In-cockpit Automation System (ALIAS), gives operators control of advanced aviation, a capability once reserved for trained pilots, enabling resupply, personnel recovery and contested logistics missions in dangerous or low-visibility areas without putting human life at risk.

As a pressure-tested mission partner to the joint services, Sikorsky is committed to delivering dependable [future-ready solutions](#) that expand warfighter capabilities and set the standard for autonomous aviation. This first-of-its-kind success at Northern Strike further proves how Sikorsky is innovating with intent on shaping the next generation of agile, adaptable aircraft systems.

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