



# Northern Strike returns to the Tip of the Mitt

DIANNA STAMPFLER | THURSDAY, AUGUST 15, 2024



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Michigan has a longstanding history of military encampments, forts, bases and camps dating back to the early 1700s. A handful of these sites remain standing as attractions, shedding light on the state’s early history while one noted locale remains an active outpost where thousands of men and women actively practice their skills and drills throughout the year.

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The Camp Grayling Joint Maneuver Training Center in Grayling was founded in 1913 after local lumber baron Rasmus Hanson donated 13,000 acres to the state for the purpose of establishing a military training facility.

Over the years, Camp Grayling has grown into the largest National Guard training facility in the United States, encompassing 148,000 acres throughout Crawford, Kalkaska and Otsego counties. The four-season facility can accommodate about 8,000 soldiers and features 337 square-km of restricted airspace, two impact areas for indirect fire and aerial weapon systems up to 500-pounds, three live-fire shoot houses and a Combined Arms Collective Training Facility.

Since 2012, the Michigan's National All-Domain Warfighting Center (NADWC) – which includes Camp Grayling as well as the 17,000-square-mile military airspace at the Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center – has organized and hosted a major military collaborative initiative known as Northern Strike.

Recognized as one of the Department of Defense's largest joint training readiness programs, Northern Strike takes place on land, in the sky, in the water and in cyberspace. According to Col. Todd Fitzpatrick, land exercise director for Northern Strike, the land and air space between Grayling and Alpena is among the best in the country for this type of training.



This year's event, August 3-17, featured more than 6,3000 participants from 32 states and territories, as well as five international groups from places like the United Kingdom. Reserve and active soldiers, from all American branches of the military – Army, Navy, Marines and Coast Guard – participated in a series of training sessions within their own units and as well as part of combined operations.

“Michigan is honored to host the Northern Strike military readiness exercises again this year,” says Governor Whitmer, who was at Camp Grayling at the onset of the event. “As Commander-in-Chief of the Michigan National Guard, I couldn't be prouder to support our troops as they train alongside service members from across the country and the world. No matter the challenge, Michigan is ready to rise to the

occasion, especially when the results make a real difference for our national defense and keep our communities safe.”

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Spread out around Camp Grayling, various sites simulate real-life wartime scenarios and give soldiers the opportunity to brush up on their in-the-field skills.

During one exercise, unit leaders talked through procedures and protocols, including walk-through demonstrations, before sending the troops into fabricated villages to practice drills such as entering and clearing buildings believed to be occupied by enemy forces.

At another station, nearly three dozen soldiers, outfitted with gas masks and special containment suits, were sent into a cinderblock chamber where eye-watering fumes were pumped in to mimic chemical warfare and test the soldier’s reactions and responses.

Soldiers with the Missouri Army National Guard, among other units, departed from the Grayling Army Airfield in UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters for training missions. Up at Oscoda-Wurtsmith Airport, members of the U.S. Air Force and Marine Corps conducted a C-5 Galaxy defuel and simulated missile threat evacuation exercise.

“This year’s schedule of NS training events reflects the abilities of Michigan and the NADWC to support Department of Defense objectives,” said U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Paul D. Rogers, adjutant general and director of the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. “We take pride in our ability to improve the exercise design each year, integrating innovative technologies and solutions into dynamic training to meet the needs of commanders across all domains and replicate what Soldiers and Airmen could face in real world situations.”

According to the Michigan office of Military and Veterans Affairs, these cooperative exercises provide a boost to the local economy. As much as \$38 million is spent in military pay, travel and spending at businesses like restaurants, bars, gas stations and stores not only in Grayling and Alpena, but in other communities like Gaylord, Waters, and Frederic.

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Throughout the year, Michigan's defense industry contributes \$30 billion for the state's economy, with nearly 4,000 businesses serving defense, homeland security and defense aerospace sectors with more than 166,000 combined jobs. Michigan is also home to some of the nation's largest ground vehicle defense companies, coming in #1 nationally for military vehicle production with 37% of the U.S. contracts.

*Dianna Stampfler has been writing professionally since high school. Twenty years ago she founded Promote Michigan and since has authored two books: Michigan's Haunted Lighthouses and Death & Lighthouses on the Great Lakes, both from The History Press.*

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