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Australian Gunners Train Philippine Army in Sierra Madre

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Australian artillery experts from the 8th/12th Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery, shared advanced tactics with the Philippine Army in a pioneering training exercise in Luzon's Sierra Madre mountains.

In a groundbreaking training initiative, gunners from the Australian Army's 8th/12th Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery (8/12 Regt RAA), conducted a first-of-its-kind Mobile Training Team (MTT) exercise with the Philippine Army in the rugged Sierra Madre mountains of Luzon, Philippines, from July 15 to August 5, 2025. Organized under the Joint Australian Training Team – Philippines (JATT-P), the three-week program at Fort Magsaysay focused on enhancing artillery skills, including gunline operations, command post procedures, forward observing, and joint fires coordination, according to a

Department of Defence release. The training involved 10 Australian gunners and members of the Philippine Army Artillery Regiment, including five from the Philippine Marine Corps, aiming to boost regional defense capabilities amid rising South China Sea tensions.

Lieutenant Erica Sitcheff, a key instructor, noted that the team built on the Philippine Army's core gunnery knowledge, refining procedures to improve responsiveness and targeting precision, as reported by Mirage News. The exercise emphasized practical skills, with Australian trainers sharing techniques for integrating artillery into multi-domain operations, critical for territorial defense. The Philippine Army's 155mm ATMOS 2000 howitzers and 105mm towed howitzers were central to the training, aligning with modern battlefield requirements, per a Philippine News Agency report. The collaboration also fostered strong interpersonal bonds, highlighted by a fellowship evening and participation in the Philippine Army Artillery Regiment's 18th anniversary parade.

This training is part of a broader JATT-P program, which plans over 20 activities in 2025 to strengthen Australia-Philippines defense ties, more than doubling last year's efforts, according to the Department of Defence. Critics, including Shadow Defence Minister Andrew Hastie, argue that the Australian Labor Party government's defense budget constraints limit such initiatives' scope, potentially undermining regional security partnerships. The exercise underscores Australia's commitment to supporting allies in the Indo-Pacific, particularly as the Philippines enhances its external defense posture, with the Sierra Madre training ground symbolizing a shared resolve to counter regional threats.