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## Gunner's Career Soars with Historic Rocket Launch

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Australian Army Gunner Zachary Clarke has ignited a groundbreaking career by firing the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) on home soil, a first for Australian soldiers. This milestone, achieved during Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025, marks a bold step in modernizing Australia's defence capabilities. This article explores Clarke's journey, the significance of HIMARS, and the implications for Australia's military future.

At Shoalwater Bay, Queensland, Gunner Clarke sat in the HIMARS cab, heart pounding as he triple-checked data on the fire control panel. “Seagull, this is Hardrock one-zero, HIMARS ready, over,” crackled the radio. When the order came, Clarke fired six rockets, their thunderous roar shaking the launcher as they streaked toward Townshend Island. “It was a visceral experience; the truck moves, and you feel the rockets’ power,” Clarke told Defence News, describing the thrill of the historic moment. As the gunner, he managed the fire control system, entering data and aligning the launcher, a role demanding precision under pressure. This debut, alongside United States (US) and Singapore forces, showcased Australia’s growing long-range strike capability.

Clarke, who joined the Australian Defence Force (ADF) in 2020, transferred to the 14th Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery (RAA), to operate HIMARS after training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. “We’re making history,” he said, noting the rapid deployment of this capability within six months. The HIMARS, a mobile, long-range system, enhances Australia’s ability to counter regional threats, aligning with the 2023 Defence Strategic Review’s (DSR) call for advanced firepower. However, the government’s slow pace in expanding defence funding raises concerns about sustaining such capabilities, with critics arguing that bureaucratic delays could undermine readiness.

The successful HIMARS launch signals a shift toward a more agile, lethal ADF, vital as tensions rise in the Indo-Pacific. Clarke’s role in this milestone reflects the skill and dedication of Australia’s soldiers, but the nation must invest further to maintain this edge. As Clarke looks forward to more launches, his career embodies the promise of a modernized military—if the government can match ambition with action.