



CASE STUDY OF PHILIPPINE ARMY PERSONNEL IN INVESTIGATING THE LOSS AND THEFT OF AN UNISSUED FIREARM IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF DAET, CAMARINES NORTE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the factors contributing to the loss or theft of an unrenewed firearm involving an active member of the Philippine Army in Daet, Camarines Norte. Specifically, it examined operational, procedural, and environmental factors; assessed personnel compliance with firearm management protocols in terms of safekeeping, renewal requirements, and reporting procedures; identified challenges in the unit's security and accountability systems; and proposed preventive measures to strengthen firearm management. The study employed a descriptive quantitative research design and utilized a structured questionnaire administered to 189 purposively selected Philippine Army personnel directly or indirectly involved in firearm handling and management. Data were analyzed using documentary analysis, weighted mean, frequency counts, and percentage distributions. Findings revealed that environmental factors were the most significant contributors to firearm loss, followed by operational and procedural factors. Personnel generally demonstrated high compliance with firearm management protocols, particularly in reporting procedures and safekeeping, although some weaknesses remained in storage practices and renewal processes. Major challenges identified included lack of regular audits, inadequate supervision,

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outdated monitoring systems, and insufficient training. The study concluded that firearm loss was influenced more by systemic and organizational vulnerabilities than isolated errors. It recommends stricter enforcement of protocols, improved documentation and monitoring systems, regular inspections, refresher training, and secure storage measures to prevent similar incidents.

Keywords: *Firearm Loss Firearm Theft, Firearm Management, Protocol Compliance, Security Accountability, Preventive Measures, Philippine Army*

INTRODUCTION

The responsible management and accountability of firearms among uniformed personnel are essential to ensuring public safety, operational readiness, and institutional integrity. Strict firearm protocols on safekeeping, renewal, and monitoring are designed to prevent misuse, diversion, and loss; however, incidents of missing or stolen government-issued firearms continue to expose weaknesses in accountability systems. International evidence shows that firearm losses remain a serious concern. In the United States, thousands of military firearms were reported lost or stolen and some were later linked to violent civilian crimes, reflecting failures in storage, surveillance, and recordkeeping (Hall, 2021). Similarly, South Africa continues to face widespread losses of state-owned firearms due to poor inventory control, negligence, and corruption, which have contributed to the illegal gun market and firearm-related violence (Isabels, 2024). Reports on Federal Firearms Licensees (FFLs)

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also show that firearm losses remain persistent, particularly among dealers and pawnbrokers, further highlighting the need for stronger monitoring systems (FFL, 2023).

In the Philippines, firearm accountability remains a critical issue, especially within the military and police sectors. Cases involving the alleged diversion of military firearms to criminal and extremist groups have raised concerns over command responsibility and internal controls (Gonzales, 2025). In Camarines Norte, the recovery of large arms caches by the Philippine Army further demonstrates the continuing security risks associated with unaccounted firearms (Nepomuceno, 2025). Moreover, the loss of government-issued firearms carries serious administrative and legal consequences, particularly when negligence, weak reporting, or procedural lapses are involved (Respicio, 2025). In this context, the present study investigates the loss or theft of an unexpired firearm involving an active member of the Philippine Army in Daet, Camarines Norte, with the aim of identifying contributing factors, assessing compliance, and proposing measures to strengthen firearm management and accountability.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to investigate and evaluate the circumstances, contributing factors, current status, and organizational implications related to the loss or theft of an unexpired firearm involving an active member of the Philippine Army in the Municipality of Daet, Camarines Norte, with the goal of enhancing accountability, security, and firearm management protocols. Specifically, it sought to identify the factors that may have contributed to the incident in terms of operational, procedural, and environmental aspects; assess the

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level of compliance of the involved personnel with existing firearm management protocols in relation to safekeeping, renewal requirements, and reporting procedures; determine the challenges within the unit's security measures and accountability systems that may have influenced the occurrence of the incident; and propose preventive measures that can strengthen firearm management and reduce the likelihood of similar incidents in future military operations.

Framework

This study is anchored on Routine Activity Theory by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson (1979), Broken Windows Theory by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling (1982), and Situational Crime Prevention Theory by Ronald V. Clarke (1980), which collectively explain firearm loss or theft in terms of opportunity, procedural discipline, and environmental security. These theories suggest that firearm loss or theft may occur when there is weak supervision, poor compliance with protocols, inadequate storage, and tolerance of minor procedural lapses. From these perspectives, the study developed the Integrated Firearm Accountability and Security Theory (IFAST), which explains that firearm loss or theft results from interconnected weaknesses in accountability, procedural compliance, environmental control, and institutional response. The theory emphasizes that effective firearm management requires continuous oversight, strict enforcement of policies, and prompt action to prevent security breaches and strengthen accountability.

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The study is guided by the Input–Process–Output (IPO) Model, which provides a systematic framework for examining firearm loss or theft incidents. The input includes the current status of firearm loss or theft cases, the personnel’s level of compliance with firearm management protocols such as safekeeping, renewal, and reporting, the contributing operational, procedural, and environmental factors, and the challenges in the unit’s security and accountability systems. The process involves gathering and analyzing data through surveys, interviews, document analysis, and incident reports to identify patterns, gaps, and weaknesses in firearm management practices. The output consists of evidence-based findings and recommendations aimed at strengthening firearm accountability, improving security measures, enhancing reporting and recovery mechanisms, and reducing the likelihood of similar incidents in future military operations.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to investigate the loss or theft of an unexpired firearm and assess firearm management practices within a Philippine Army unit in Daet, Camarines Norte. The study involved 189 purposively selected personnel who were directly or indirectly engaged in firearm handling, safekeeping, renewal, and reporting procedures. Data were gathered using a validated structured questionnaire composed of three parts: compliance with firearm management protocols, contributing factors to firearm loss, and challenges within the unit’s security and accountability system. Documentary analysis of incident reports, firearm logs, and related records was also conducted to determine the current status of the case. The data gathering process followed

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ethical procedures, including securing permissions, ensuring confidentiality, and validating responses through consultation with key personnel. Data were analyzed using documentary analysis, weighted mean, frequency counts, and percentage distributions to assess compliance levels, identify operational, procedural, and environmental factors, and determine the major security and accountability challenges affecting firearm management. The findings provided a structured basis for identifying gaps in existing practices and proposing preventive measures to strengthen firearm accountability, operational security, and institutional control within the unit.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Factors that Contributed to the Loss of Firearm Cases

a. Operational Factors

The findings showed that operational factors contributed to firearm loss cases to a noticeable extent (OWM = 2.79, Agree). Among the indicators, the high-risk environment had the strongest influence (WM = 3.35, Strongly Agree), indicating that hazardous operational settings increased the likelihood of security oversights. Likewise, heavy workload and mission demands (WM = 2.85, Agree) and the nature of field operations (WM = 3.10, Agree) were perceived to affect firearm monitoring and safekeeping. However, long deployment hours (WM = 2.30, Disagree) and operational movements (WM = 2.35, Disagree) were seen as less influential. These findings suggest that firearm accountability becomes more vulnerable under high-risk and demanding operational conditions, supporting the need for risk-sensitive firearm

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management measures during field missions (Philippine News Agency, 2022; Respicio, 2025; Philippine National Police, 2020).

b. Procedural Factors

The results revealed that procedural factors also contributed to firearm loss cases (OWM = 2.59, Agree). The most significant factor was the failure to strictly implement firearm issuance and turnover procedures (WM = 3.95, Strongly Agree), followed by unclear documentation procedures related to firearm accountability (WM = 3.00, Agree). In contrast, ineffective monitoring systems for renewals (WM = 1.85, Disagree), inadequate personnel briefing (WM = 1.80, Disagree), and insufficient supervisory checks (WM = 2.35, Disagree) were perceived as less contributory. These findings imply that weaknesses in issuance, turnover, and documentation processes create gaps in firearm accountability, emphasizing the importance of stricter procedural enforcement and standardized documentation systems to prevent firearm loss (Respicio, 2025; Philippine National Police, 2021).

c. Environmental Factors

Among the three dimensions, environmental factors emerged as the strongest contributors to firearm loss (OWM = 3.26, Strongly Agree). The lack of secure temporary firearm storage facilities (WM = 3.90, Strongly Agree) and unexpected environmental risks (WM = 3.60, Strongly Agree) were the most significant concerns. Other factors such as terrain or physical environment (WM = 3.15, Agree), poor weather conditions (WM = 2.90, Agree), and crowded or high-traffic areas (WM = 2.75, Agree) also contributed to firearm vulnerability.

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These findings indicate that the physical and situational environment plays a major role in firearm security, highlighting the need for secure storage, environmental risk assessment, and context-based operational planning (Respicio, 2025; Philippine News Agency, 2025; Inquirer Opinion, 2024).

2. Level of Compliance with Existing Firearm Management Protocols

a. Safekeeping

The level of compliance in terms of safekeeping was found to be very high (AWM = 3.87, Fully Complied). Personnel showed full compliance in following safety measures while carrying firearms, keeping firearms away from unauthorized individuals, and observing safekeeping protocols during field and administrative duties (all WM = 4.00). Regular inspections were also highly observed (WM = 3.80, Fully Complied). However, the indicator on properly securing firearms in designated storage areas obtained the lowest score (WM = 3.45, Moderately Complied), suggesting occasional lapses in storage practices. Overall, the findings imply that while personnel generally practice responsible firearm handling, storage compliance remains an area for improvement to strengthen firearm security and accountability (Mellijor, 2022; Philippine News Agency, 2024).

b. Renewal Requirements

The findings showed that personnel were also highly compliant with renewal requirements (AWM = 3.75, Fully Complied). The highest score was obtained by reporting the firearm's renewal status to appropriate officers (WM = 4.00, Fully Complied), followed by

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acknowledging renewal reminders (WM = 3.95) and identifying renewal lapses before deployment (WM = 3.90). Meanwhile, updating renewal documents on time and following all renewal procedures both received slightly lower but still favorable ratings (WM = 3.45, Fully Complied). These results indicate that the unit maintains a strong culture of administrative accountability, although continuous monitoring and streamlining of renewal procedures are still needed to avoid minor delays (Duterte, 2022; Philippine News Agency, 2025; Mellijor, 2022).

c. Reporting Procedures

Among the compliance variables, reporting procedures obtained the highest level of compliance (OWM = 3.98, Fully Complied). Personnel fully complied with immediately reporting firearm incidents to the chain of command, completing all required reports, and accurately documenting relevant details (all WM = 4.00). Similarly, strict adherence to reporting timelines and proper escalation of incidents both scored 3.95, Fully Complied. These findings indicate a strong culture of accountability, transparency, and procedural discipline within the unit. High compliance in reporting is critical in supporting timely investigations, recovery efforts, and command oversight, thereby reducing the risk of firearm misuse or diversion (Philippine News Agency, 2025; Ballar, 2022; Respicio, 2025; Philippine National Police, 2021; Mellijor, 2022).

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3. Challenges in the Unit's Security Systems

The results identified several major security system challenges that may have contributed to firearm loss. The most significant issue was the lack of regular, documented inspections or internal audits (100%), followed by inadequate supervision in the issuance, storage, and return of firearms (85%), weak or outdated monitoring systems (75%), and insufficient training of personnel (75%). Other notable concerns included inconsistent enforcement of security protocols (65%), absence of clear procedures for handling unexpired firearms (45%), overdependence on manual record-keeping (35%), and communication gaps (30%). These findings suggest that the unit's security framework is weakened by both procedural and systemic limitations, emphasizing the need for regular audits, upgraded monitoring systems, stronger supervision, and enhanced training to reinforce firearm accountability (Philippine Development Plan, 2025; Manila Bulletin, 2026; Respicio, 2025).

4. Preventive Measures that Can Strengthen Firearm Management

The respondents strongly agreed on several preventive measures that can improve firearm management. The most supported strategy was the implementation of a centralized, automated firearm monitoring system (100%), followed by strict enforcement of firearm issuance, turnover, and return procedures (90%) and improved internal communication on firearm policies and directives (90%). Other highly recommended measures included regular documented inspections (85%), clear designation of accountable officers (85%), strengthened supervisory checks and command responsibility (85%), and consistent

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disciplinary actions (85%). Meanwhile, mandatory refresher training (75%), immediate reporting of discrepancies (75%), and secure storage facilities during field operations (80%) were also recognized as important. These findings suggest that effective firearm management requires a combination of technology, procedural rigor, personnel accountability, and continuous training, which together can strengthen operational security and minimize firearm loss incidents (National Economic and Development Authority, 2023; NAPOLCOM-R3, 2023; Philippine National Police, 2021; TVNews, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that firearm loss or theft within the unit was influenced by a combination of operational, procedural, and environmental factors, as well as weaknesses in the existing security and accountability systems. Although personnel generally demonstrated compliance with firearm management protocols—particularly in safekeeping, renewal requirements, and reporting procedures—certain lapses in documentation, monitoring, supervision, and security controls remained evident. The study further revealed that challenges such as inadequate inspections, outdated tracking mechanisms, insufficient training, and inconsistent enforcement of procedures contributed to the vulnerability of firearm accountability. Overall, the findings suggest that while basic firearm management practices are present within the unit, there is still a significant need to strengthen institutional controls, improve procedural consistency, and implement more effective preventive measures to ensure accountability, operational security, and the prevention of similar incidents in the future.

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RECOMMENDATION

In light of the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that the unit strengthen its firearm management system through the strict enforcement of established protocols, improved documentation and monitoring procedures, regular inspections, and enhanced supervisory oversight. Continuous training and refresher programs should be conducted to ensure that all personnel remain knowledgeable and compliant with safekeeping, renewal, and reporting requirements. The adoption of clearer accountability measures, updated tracking systems, and more secure firearm storage and handling practices is also essential to address existing vulnerabilities. Furthermore, unit leaders, administrative officers, and firearm custodians should work collaboratively to institutionalize preventive strategies that promote discipline, accountability, and operational readiness, thereby minimizing the risk of firearm loss or theft in future military operations.

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