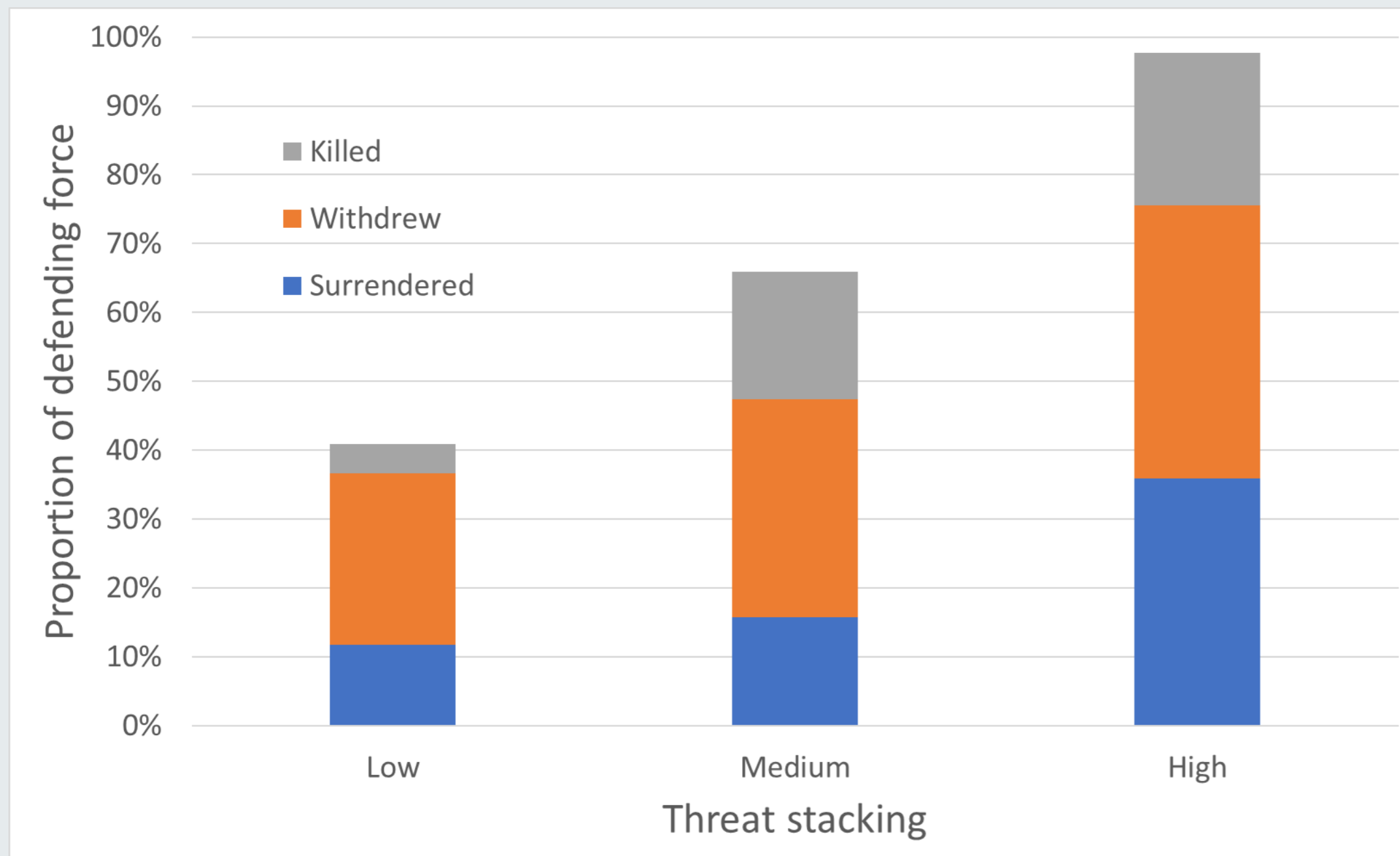


# Tactical Psychology

## What makes soldiers run, hide and surrender?

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### Introduction

Research into tactical psychology has found remarkable effects on opponent willingness and ability to fight. These effects can be achieved by applying a few apparently simple techniques:

- *Threat stacking* causes indecision and inaction, more than doubling the number of opponents surrendering.
- *Flanking* gives an obvious sign that the opponents are unlikely to succeed and more than trebles the number withdrawing from combat.
- *Proximity* (getting close to the enemy) once the first two effects are achieved, allows interpersonal non-verbal negotiation which 'seals the deal'.

Together, these techniques rapidly end an engagement in favour of the attacker or counter-attacker. Unfortunately, while many soldiers often understand the psychological and operational impact of these techniques, the effects have only recently been quantified and are yet to be incorporated into collective training and defence analysis. Also, while appearing simple, they are very difficult to achieve in the fog and friction of combat, especially when they have not been formally taught.

The findings have been incorporated

into the *Tactical Psychology Model*, a mathematical simulation that combines only those statistically significant causal relationships that have been quantified by psychological research and historical analysis. However, the model is based on work (part-funded by the Defence and Security Accelerator) which aimed to turn a commercial strategy game into a low-cost trainer. The model's source data is deliberately "good enough for gaming" and nothing more.

The model is not yet suitable for defence decision support because it is based on opportunity samples of data that were examined without reference to operational- and strategic-level effects. The next stage of the work, and the subject of this PhD, is to collect and analyse a larger sample of data that accounts for these effects.

### Goal

To test the validity of the Tactical Psychology Model using more robust tests on a larger and more controlled historical sample.

### Method

The PhD study is examining over 100 engagements from a single operation (Operation Veritable, February 1945) to allow robust statistical tests to be applied to a more reliable and valid measures set. The study is building battle narratives from primary source

materials then applying root cause analysis and behaviourally anchored rating scales to determine levels of threat stacking, flanking and proximity. These are then compared to traditional measures of effectiveness such as casualty and surrender rates.

### Results

The study is still in its first year, but early results support the main components of the model. The common perception of close combat being attritional is upturned when the three basic techniques are applied, with many more enemies captured than killed.

There have, however, been several unforeseen interactions that have eluded quantification. These include a profound effect from soldier fatigue and some counter-intuitive effects from artillery suppressive fire.

One promising finding is the extent to which operational-level indecision undermines the ability of junior commanders to exploit tactical psychology, often halving the chance of mission success. This finding is expanding the original aims of the project to re-examine the interaction between command systems and operational effectiveness.

### Discussion

The initial findings challenge traditional interpretations of morale

and willingness to fight. By introducing a measurable and predictable cognitive component at the tactical level, the work has potential to enhance doctrine, defence decisions and collective training.

By showing the human effect of combined arms manoeuvre, the findings could help re-align tactical and strategic levels. If the effects prove valid and can be trained, they have the potential to prevent future conflicts descending into barbarity. While the bloodless battle is an illusion, the less-blood battle is attainable. It is also much quicker and cheaper than the current attritional approach.

### References

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