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A Final Technical Report  
Prepared Under Grant No. N00014-75-C-0691

STRUCTURAL CHARACTERIZATION OF SCHLADITZ WHISKERS

Submitted to:

Office of Naval Research  
Department of the Navy  
800 North Quincy Street  
Arlington, Virginia 22217

Attention: Metallurgy Division  
Code 471

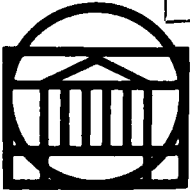
Submitted by:

H. G. F. Wilsdorf  
Professor

Report No. UVA/525321/MS82/104  
May 1982

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DEPARTMENT OF MATERIALS SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA  
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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)  Polycrystalline iron whiskers containing 1.5 w/o C and 0.8% O have an extraordinary ultimate tensile strength between 6 and 8 GPa. Their microstructure has been investigated by transmission electron microscopy and electron diffraction techniques. It has been found that the whiskers consist of $\alpha$ -Fe grains between 2 nm and 30 nm in diameter which do not have sharp boundaries but are separated by a wide boundary region. A microdispersion of $\alpha$ -Fe, $Fe_3O_4$ , $Fe_3C$ , $\alpha$ - $Fe_2O_3$ and carbon is prevalent throughout the		

whisker volume. Again, no sharp phase boundaries seem to exist which could imply a transitional region between second phase particles characterized by a concentration gradient and mixed covalent and metal bonding. It is concluded that a new strengthening mechanism for alloys is responsible for the mechanical properties of CVD produced steel whiskers. This mechanism requires a grain size below 30 nm, non-planar grain boundaries and a microdispersion of particles of iron oxides, iron carbides and carbon. Also, the covalent/metallic bonding mix within the transition region between the minute second phase particles and the  $\alpha$ -Fe matrix is considered an essential component of the strengthening mechanism.

## SECTION I

### INTRODUCTION AND SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND

The considerable effort that has been expended on whisker research in the fifties and early sixties was initiated by the discovery of the great specific strength of metal whiskers, by Herring and Galt<sup>1</sup> for the case of tin whiskers, that prompted the expectation that by the use of whiskers, super-strong materials could be produced.

Best known with respect to the extraordinary strength of whiskers is the work by Brenner<sup>2,3</sup> who was the first to show that whisker strength decreases with increasing diameter,  $d$ , finding for iron whiskers the relationship<sup>2</sup>

$$\sigma_{Av} = \frac{1630}{d} - 50 \text{ (kg/mm}^2\text{)}, \text{ if } d \text{ is measured in microns,}$$

where  $\sigma_{Av}$  is the average ultimate tensile stress of whiskers of same diameter,  $d$ . This remarkable dependence of strength on whisker diameter was subsequently confirmed<sup>3-6</sup> and is currently accepted in the literature as a rather fundamental property of whiskers.

The highest strength found by Brenner for any iron whisker was a little less than 1350 kg/mm<sup>2</sup>, the next highest about 550 kg/mm<sup>2</sup>, at diameters of about 1.5 and 3.3 microns, respectively,<sup>2</sup> and the former value has remained to be the highest ever reported. All iron whiskers examined by Brenner were single crystalline, and all fractured without warning and without detectable preceding plastic deformation.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the period during which there had been an intensive research interest in whiskers within the international scientific community, say, between 1952 and 1970, and up to the present time, it has been taken as axiomatic that strong metal whiskers are nearly perfect single crystals. The

similarly wide-spread notion that whiskers were discovered only recently, lacks any factual basis. Thus, in their survey article on the growth of crystal whiskers, Nabarro and Jackson<sup>7</sup> adduce numerous references describing observations on whiskers of many different kinds, extending back as far as 1574.<sup>8</sup> Among the 250 references pertaining to whiskers,<sup>7</sup> Nabarro and Jackson have included forty-seven dating from 1930 and earlier, with quite a few of these written before this century.

The "Schladitz-Whiskers" are grown from the gaseous phase by the chemical decomposition of some suitable carbonyl or other metal-containing gas on substrates at elevated temperatures. A schematic diagram of the apparatus invented by H. J. Schladitz for this purpose has been given by Dawihl and Eicke<sup>9</sup> and a photograph of it is given in Figure 1. The decisive principle involved, besides the well-known thermal decomposition of metal carbonyls, is the use of a magnetic field to keep the whiskers straight while they are still extremely thin. It appears that the whiskers are formed in their full length of typically one or a few mm almost instantaneously, and then thicken by the further deposition of metal.<sup>10</sup> Schladitz<sup>10,11,12,13</sup> as well as Dawihl and Eicke<sup>9,14</sup> have investigated the most important physical properties of these whiskers, focusing their attention primarily on iron whiskers. Their properties include the following: the grain size in the as-deposited state is about 90 Å. Recrystallization in iron whiskers begins at about 300°C.<sup>11</sup> As indicated in Figure 2, the tensile strength of the whiskers is largely independent of diameter,<sup>12</sup>--in stark contrast to the discussed behavior of single crystalline metal whiskers--and lies between 500 and 800 kp/mm<sup>2</sup> for carefully produced whiskers with diameters between about 0.1 and 50 microns.<sup>10</sup> In 'pure' whiskers the strength drops to about 200 kg/mm<sup>2</sup> at 600°C, but for whiskers containing 2.5% Cr, the micro hardness and, hence, by inference

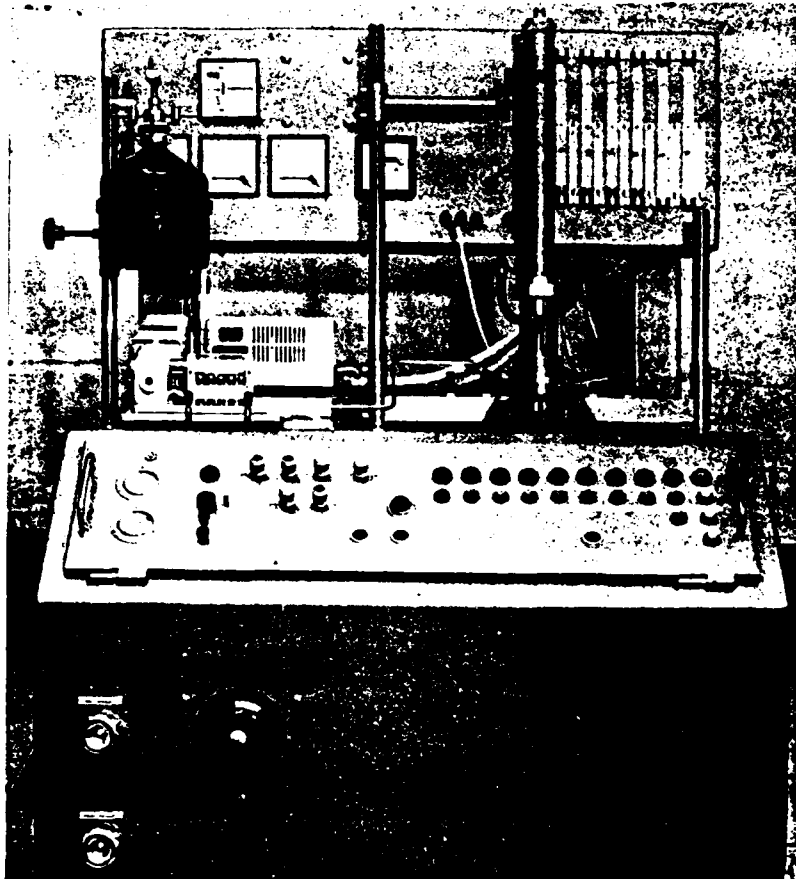


Figure 1. Schladitz whisker machine. For additional information see H. J. Schladitz, German Patent No. 1224934 (1964), U. S. Patents No. 3441408 and No. 3570829 (1969/1971).

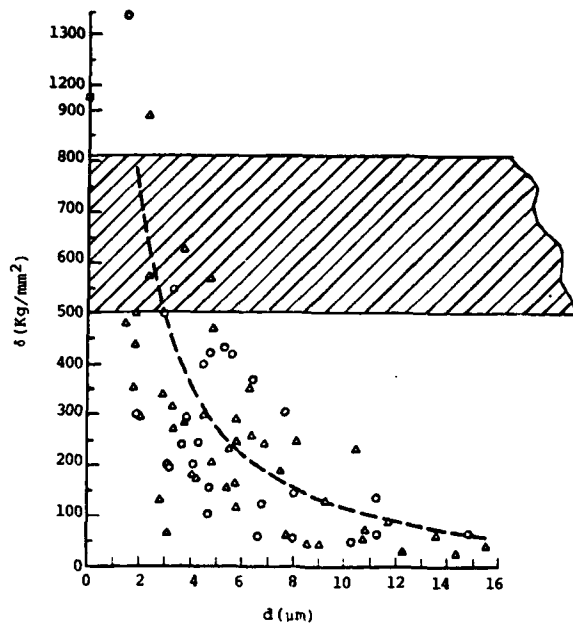


Figure 2. Published values for the tensile strengths of single crystal iron whiskers (apparently extracted from refs. 2 to 6), revealing the considerable scatter in experimental values and the dependence of whisker strength on diameter, as compared to the strength of polycrystalline iron Schladitz whiskers (shaded region) as given in ref. 12, based on W. H. Sutton and H. W. Rauch, Sr. (General Electric Information Series, R66SD46, Aug. 1966).

the tensile strength, remains constant up to 800°C, and at 1000°C is only 20% lower than at room temperature.<sup>9,11,14</sup>

The microstructure of 'pure' iron whiskers reveals two intermingled phases of unknown chemical composition, or a third phase by itself.<sup>9</sup> Certainly, the material is not in thermodynamical equilibrium as judged from the Fe-C-O constitution diagram.<sup>9,14</sup> In the as-grown state, the so-called 'pure' iron whiskers, i.e. those which have not been deliberately alloyed, contain in excess of 1% carbon, about 80% of which is in free form, a similar amount of oxygen, and in the order of 0.04% nitrogen, and thus are in composition the same as carbonyl iron powder.<sup>9</sup> The coercive force of Schladitz-whiskers of iron is roughly 50% of that of carbon steels.<sup>9,14</sup>

For the practical applicability of Schladitz-whiskers it is of extreme importance that they are of nearly uniform thickness within any one batch made and also have similar lengths and tensile strengths as well as micro-hardness.<sup>12</sup> On a very fine scale, however, the whisker surfaces are not smooth but are covered with rounded protuberances. This is a welcome feature since it facilitates the bonding between whiskers and matrix when composites are made. Moreover, the surface roughness, and thus the surface to volume ratio, can be deliberately influenced.<sup>10</sup> According to a diagram published by Schladitz,<sup>13</sup> the surface area,  $A$ , measured in square meters ( $m^2$ ), per gramme of iron is related to the average whisker diameter,  $d$ , as  $A \cong 13 (m^2)/d$  if  $d$  is measured in microns and the whiskers are made deliberately rough surfaced, while the normally 'smooth' whiskers yield  $A \cong 4 (m^2)/d$ . By contrast, Dawihl and Eicke<sup>9</sup> quote a specific surface value of  $0.3 m^2/g$  for carbonyl iron powder. Thus, since whiskers with diameters of 1 micron and less can be readily made, the surface to volume ratio of Schladitz whiskers can be made quite large.

As the whiskers grow by thermal decomposition of carbonyls out of the gas phase, they may be deliberately alloyed by the simultaneous deposition of two or more substances, including nickel, chromium, tungsten, oxides and carbides, or, alternatively shells of different chemical composition may be laid down one on the other.<sup>12</sup> Hence, also, iron whiskers may be nickel- or chrome-plated to impart to them corrosion resistance if their intended use should demand this.

It was the objective of this research to relate the microstructural features of CVD steel filaments to their extraordinary strength in tensile loading. X-ray and electron diffraction, transmission electron microscopy (including analytical techniques), field ion microscopy and Mössbauer studies were employed in this research.

## SECTION II

### RESULTS

#### A. Analytical Whisker Apparatus

With an increasing understanding of the growth of steel whiskers and their properties, certain refinements in production techniques and investigational methods were required.

Some changes have been made which have rendered the Schladitz whisker machine more versatile: (a) the magnetic field strength was increased from 0.125 T to 0.22 T; and (b) "analytical" screens as anchoring substrates were used throughout; (c) a new set of flowmeters was installed allowing a precise control of gas flow; (d) the pulsating finger pump was replaced by a glass reservoir with precision metering valve. Adjusting the nitrogen pressure, carbonyl flow rates can be controlled for continuous introduction into the vaporizer.

The last two changes reduce the probability that gas and carbonyl flow instabilities are produced in the reaction space, and the screen arrangement permits the removal of the whiskers without damage and preserves the space location where they were grown. A thermocouple system was completed and tested on the whisker apparatus. The thermocouple inputs could be recorded simultaneously on a point recorder or could be seen at will on a digital read-out meter without affecting the recordings. A feedback capability could anticipate trends of temperature changes and thus permit the maintenance of predetermined temperatures.

The following temperature measurements were obtained for the Schladitz apparatus. Temperature control in this machine is by thermostatic control which allows predetermined temperature schedules. Temperature measurements have been made for thermostat readings between 390°C and 250°C which

1

correspond to actual temperatures in the reaction cylinder between 320° and 180°C. Also temperature gradients were determined at three levels in the cylinder. Near the top of the reaction zone the temperature drop from the hot region to the low temperature region (i.e. to the center carbonyl vaporizer) is 20°C for the thermostat setting of 320°C which corresponds to an actual decomposition temperature of 245° to 265°C. In the central and lower zone of the reaction cylinder the temperature gradient is 5°C only.

#### B. General Microstructure

The Schladitz process involves the decomposition of iron pentacarbonyl in the presence of a magnetic field which has to be homogeneous throughout the reaction space. The whiskers described in the following pages were mostly grown at a field strength of 0.125T.  $\text{Fe}(\text{CO})_5$  decomposes over a temperature range of about 150°C to 280°C; the temperature dependent deposition rate is known.<sup>15</sup> One can safely assume that the first iron crystals are produced by gas phase nucleation at about 260°C. They arrange themselves into stringlike assemblies parallel to the magnetic field lines and thus form the "core" of the whiskers. Then, the temperature is generally adjusted to a lower level where gas phase diffusion is the predominant mechanism of deposition and the whiskers are grown to the desired thickness over a period from 3 to 20 minutes or even longer. In addition to temperature, carbonyl flow rate and magnetic field strength, reaction space geometry, nucleation surfaces, types and pressure of carrier gases, and exhaust conditions are the most important variables; they also will affect the chemical composition of the whiskers. They normally contain between 1 and 1.8 w/o of carbon and 2.8 w/o oxygen plus 0.01 w/o nitrogen and possibly insignificant amounts of metallic impurities. A careful chemical analysis of the whiskers was made by Dawihl and Eicke,<sup>9,14</sup> Lashmore,<sup>16</sup> and Newkirk and Wilsdorf.<sup>17</sup>

The ultimate tensile strength (UTS) of polycrystalline steel whiskers has been reported to reach almost 8 GPa (800 Kg/mm<sup>2</sup>).<sup>11,14</sup> In contrast to single crystal whiskers the polycrystalline whiskers UTS is not dependent on whisker diameter. Tensile testing of the whiskers is delicate and time consuming and most data are reported for the convenient thickness range of 5 to 30  $\mu\text{m}$ . Frequently, microhardness tests are employed for strength determinations since a conversion from pyramid hardness to ultimate strength can be made<sup>18,19</sup>; a confirmation of this relationship for the steel whiskers has been obtained.<sup>16</sup> Measurements of UTS by three independent researchers at the University of Virginia yielded average values of 3.8 GPa, 3.6 GPa and 3 GPa for the best batches with maximum values of 6 GPa, 4.2 GPa, and 5 GPa, respectively.<sup>16,20,21</sup> Whiskers can be obtained with diameters in excess of 100 $\mu\text{m}$  but tensile tests have not been conducted on whiskers thicker than 30 $\mu\text{m}$ . Larger diameter whiskers often can be observed to have surface cracks in an approximately axial direction, and it is anticipated that they may have reduced strength. In regard to mechanical properties we will limit our discussion to whiskers in the 5 $\mu\text{m}$  to 30 $\mu\text{m}$  range. The whiskers fail in a brittle fracture mode.

Polycrystalline steel whiskers have an extremely small grain size which ranges consistently between 5 nm and 30 nm, occasionally becoming as large as 50 nm. Figure 3 shows the typical microstructure of the whiskers as seen by transmission electron microscopy (TEM). Many grains are not transparent which does not indicate that they are thicker but rather that double diffraction diverts the primary electrons on account of two or more crystallites lying on top of each other in the direction of the electron beam. The grains do not contain dislocations unless they are present in grain boundaries. Even when the electron beam transmits a single grain which is not in diffraction

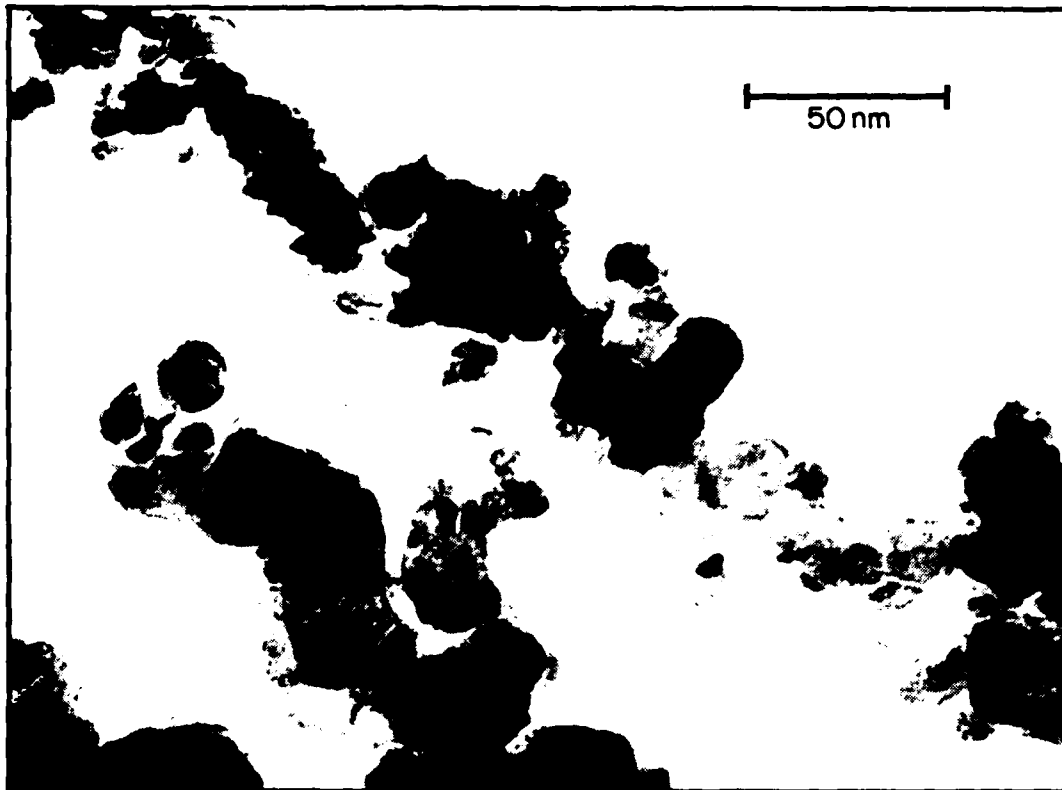


Figure 3. Transmission electron micrograph showing the very small grain size of steel whiskers between 5 nm and 30 nm. Note mottled background in transparent grains.

orientation, the crystallites appear with a mottled background. Details of this unusual phenomenon have been clarified recently by a field ion microscope study (FIM) by Inal and Murr<sup>22</sup> who found that the crystallites did not have a "long-range" crystallinity but were frequently disturbed by many regions different from the iron lattice. Figures 4a and 4b illustrate several typical field-ion images. These field-ion micrographs are lacking in the surface atomic symmetry and detail normally associated with field-ion images of metal and alloy emission end forms, but they are typical of the images which could be obtained using helium image-gas imaging at 78 K. The images of Figure 4 show several features of the whisker microstructure. First, it should be

apparent that there is no "long-range" crystallinity. Figure 4a shows that grain sizes characteristic of individual crystallites are generally about 2nm. Furthermore, the images in Figure 4 contain numerous, large image points which can be interpreted as being carbon or carbonlike,<sup>23</sup> or molecular in nature, i.e. they could be carbides or oxides. Previous X-ray studies have indicated that carbon, carbides, and oxides are incorporated into the whisker microstructure.<sup>9</sup> Figure 4 shows that such inclusions are distributed somewhat randomly within the microstructure, and not restricted to the grain boundaries.

The fact that the field-ion images are somewhat restricted to short-range order or small crystallite areas is due in part to the fact that the minimum tip radius will be determined to a large extent by the sizes of the crystallites composing the core or center of the individual fibers. In Figures 4a and b, however, only the central core structure forms the image. This is because the electroetching produces a systematic removal of the outer surface shells as the end form or tip is created at the core. Consequently, the images of Figures 4a and b confirm that some of the grains at the actual core are roughly 2 nm. The grain size of  $\alpha$ -iron in the core and in the concentric cylindrical shells surrounding the core, varies between 2 and 30 nm depending on the local conditions governing the CVD process. Figures 4a and b are illustrating this difference in the grain size. No grain boundaries were apparent, and there was, as noted above, little crystal order in excess of regions measuring 2 to 5 nm in size. A great deal of the image points were unstable and images of single points (atoms or molecules) would appear, split into two arcs, grow, and disappear as if some gas or other species was being drawn from the specimen by the high field condition.

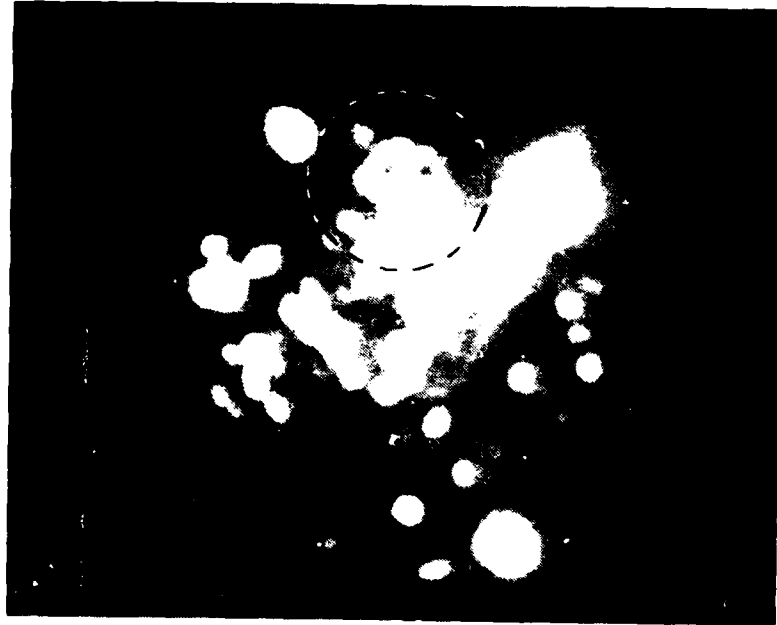


Figure 4a. Field ion microscope images of Fe-C filaments. Edge-plane structure characteristic of small crystallite of  $\alpha$ -Fe is shown circled. Crystal (grain) sizes measured from these observations averaged roughly 2 nm.

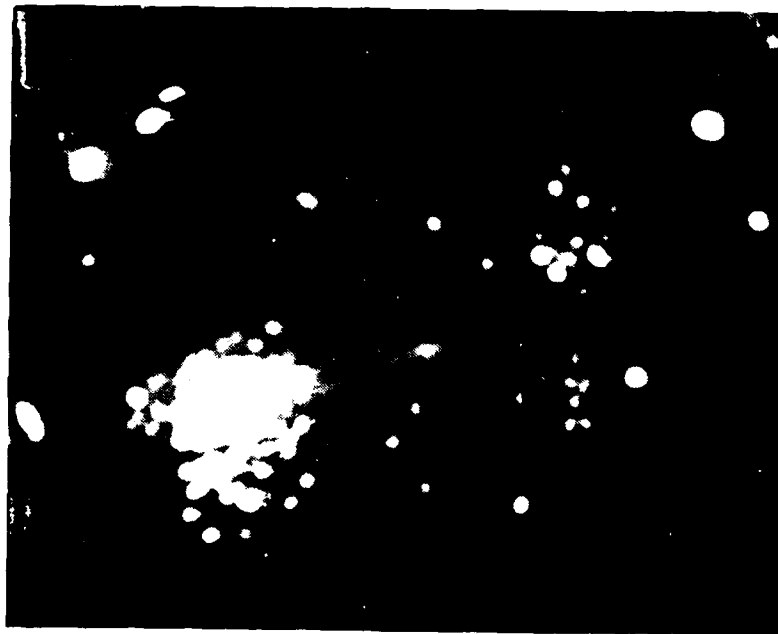


Figure 4b. Large image spots and streaks suggestive of inclusions of carbon, carbides or oxides within the microstructure. The structure is characteristically "amorphous."

X-ray and electron diffraction patterns were obtained in order to determine in which form carbon and oxygen were present in the whiskers. Table I lists measurements of d-values from X-ray and electron diffraction patterns together with estimated intensities. Also, the d-values for  $\alpha$ -Fe,  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>, Fe<sub>3</sub>C, and graphite have been listed and it is seen that a number of these substances frequently have d-spacings which coincide. X-ray and electron diffraction lines 9, 18, 20, 21 are unambiguously due to  $\alpha$ -Fe. The presence of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> and Fe<sub>3</sub>C is clearly indicated in the X-ray diffraction data and, taking into account the overlap, the agreement with expected intensities is fair. Traces of  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> seem to be present, but graphite is not indicated.

Electron diffraction patterns hold some special interest for the analysis in that four lines are made up primarily from spots while the remaining five lines have a uniform intensity. All spotty lines are associated with  $\alpha$ -Fe rings while lines 1, 2, 4, 15 and 17 have the d-spacings of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>. Although lines 4 and 15 coincide with d-spacings of Fe<sub>3</sub>C, the intensities of the former are (100) and (85) compared to the intensities of Fe<sub>3</sub>C (5) and (7). Also, the strongest Fe<sub>3</sub>C line, No. 3, is absent in the electron diffraction pattern. The spottiness of the iron rings was to be expected from the electron micrographs and agrees well with the grain size measurements of up to 30 nm. The rings ascribed to Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> with their homogeneous intensity, on the other hand, must be caused by crystals less than 5 nm size.

### C. Effect of Magnetic Field on Strength

The role played by the magnetic field on the production of whiskers obviously is a very important aspect of understanding the strengthening mechanism. Ejim<sup>20</sup> investigated seven batches of whiskers produced at 0.016, 0.03, 0.072, 0.09, 0.126, 0.18 and 0.22T. His results are shown in Figure 5. The strength of the whiskers increased with magnetic field strength up to

TABLE I  
X-Ray and Electron Diffraction Data from Whiskers

Ref. No.	X-Ray Diffr.	$\alpha$ -Fe	$\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$	d-values $\text{Fe}_3\text{C}$	$\alpha$ - $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$	Graphite	Electron Diffraction
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1			0.485 (40)		0.366 (25)	0.336 (100)	0.481 w cont.
2	0.298 (4)		0.297 (70)				0.299 w cont.
3	0.268 (6)				0.269 (100)		
4	0.254 (21)		0.253 (100)	0.254 (5)			0.256 m cont.
			0.242 (10)				
5	0.240 (12)		0.238 (65)	0.251 (50)			
6	0.228 (10)			0.238 (65)			
7	0.223 (10)			0.226 (25)			
				0.220 (25)		0.213 (10)	
8	0.210 (14)		0.209 (70)	0.210 (60)			
				0.206 (70)			
9	0.203 (st)	0.203 (100)		0.202 (60)	0.202 (30)	0.203 (50)	0.203 st spotty
				0.201 (100)			
10	0.194 (9)			0.197 (55)			
11	0.188 (12)			0.187 (30)			
12	0.186 (16)			0.185 (40)		0.180 (5)	
13	0.176 (6)			0.175 (15)			
14	0.169 (5)		0.171 (60)	0.169 (15)	0.170 (60)	0.168 (80)	0.162 w cont.
15	0.162 (7)		0.161 (85)	0.161 (7)			
16	0.159 (8)			0.158 (20)		0.154 (10)	
17	0.149 (10)		0.148 (85)		0.148 (35)		0.149 m cont.
					0.145 (45)		
18	0.143 (100)	0.143 (19)					0.143 m spotty
19	0.132 (5)		0.132 (20)				
20	0.117 (st)	0.117 (30)				0.123 (30)	0.116 st spotty
						0.114 (5)	
21	0.101 (32)	0.1013 (9)				0.112 (20)	0.104 w spotty

( ) estimated intensities, w = weak int., m = medium int., st = strong int.,

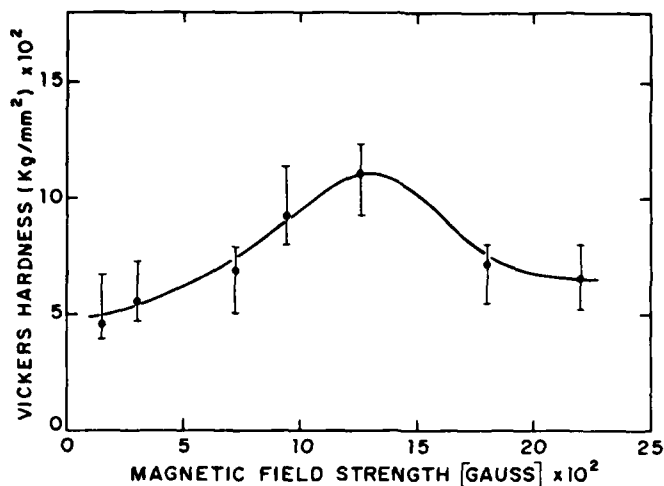


Figure 5. Dependence of microhardness of magnetic field strength for Fe-C Whiskers.

0.125T and then declined again. The effect has not been explained as yet, despite efforts to discern differences in microstructure by TEM. Grain sizes and other microstructural details are all comparable for the seven runs made.

After having found that the maximum strength occurred when applying a field of 0.125T, whiskers were characterized also as to their diameter, length, and surface topography. Eight runs were monitored from zero to 0.22T and the range of diameters is listed in Table II below. Only at low magnetic fields is the effect significant. Viewing whiskers at low magnifications in the electron microscope one finds that "macroscopically" the whisker alignment parallel to the field is poor for the runs at low field strengths.

Further, it was found that the strength was not dependent on diameter for whiskers  $> 10 \mu\text{m}$  as determined by microhardness tests. Since in the course of this specific investigation whiskers were grown routinely to diameters  $> 20 \mu\text{m}$ , it was observed by scanning electron microscopy that many whiskers had developed cracks at their surfaces after exceeding a thickness

TABLE II

Typical Maximum Range of Diameters for Whiskers  
Produced at Different Field Strengths

<u>Magnetic Field Strength (Tesla)</u>	<u>Range of Diameters (<math>\mu\text{m}</math>)</u>
0	no whiskers
0.016	7 - 10
0.030	10 - 15
0.072	15 - 20
0.090	22 - 40
0.126	30 - 57
0.180	30 - 50
0.220	30 - 52

of 30  $\mu\text{m}$ . The length of the whiskers varies for these runs between 0.25 mm and 5 mm independent of field strength applied.

The surface topography of whiskers depends on their thickness regardless of field strength. Up to diameters of 15  $\mu\text{m}$  the surface exhibits nodular features while whiskers thicker than 15  $\mu\text{m}$  have ring-like ridges. All whiskers have a well-rounded end geometry.

#### D. Mössbauer Study

Despite some concentrated efforts the position of carbon atoms remained obscure. Earlier it had been speculated by Lashmore that carbon might have combined with Fe to form  $\text{Fe}_3\text{C}$ . No iron carbide was detected by X-ray or electron diffraction methods in the virgin whiskers. In order to check the possibility of a size effect, a Mössbauer investigation was conducted.

Mössbauer measurements were made for two samples. Sample 1 was prepared by grinding whiskers to powder and mixing them with boron nitride to produce a sample thickness of 20  $\text{mg}/\text{cm}^2$ . Sample 2 was prepared by placing whole whiskers in a sample holder in such a way that all the whiskers lie perpendicular to the incident gamma rays.

An Austin Science Associates model S-3 constant acceleration spectrometer was used together with an Amperex xenon methane proportional counter, and a Nuclear Data model 2200 multichannel analyzer. The source material used for sample 1 is  $^{57}\text{Co}$  in Cu. The source for sample 2 is Co  $^{57}\text{Cr}$ , kindly loaned to us by the Spire Corporation of Bedford, Massachusetts. Both experiments were performed with transmission geometry and with source and absorber at room temperature. The data was fit to a six line Lorentzian curve using an iterative least squares fitting program on an IBM 370/165 computer. The spectra were fit to a six line magnetically split pattern with no quadruple splitting. The widths of all six lines were constrained to be the same and the intensities of the lines were pair-wise constrained to be equal. The spectrometer was calibrated using an  $\alpha$ -Fe foil. Velocities shown in the figure are relative to  $\alpha$ -Fe.

The spectrum of sample 1 (Fig. 6) is basically that of  $\alpha$ -Fe. However, the peaks are broadened on the inner side and the regions between the peaks

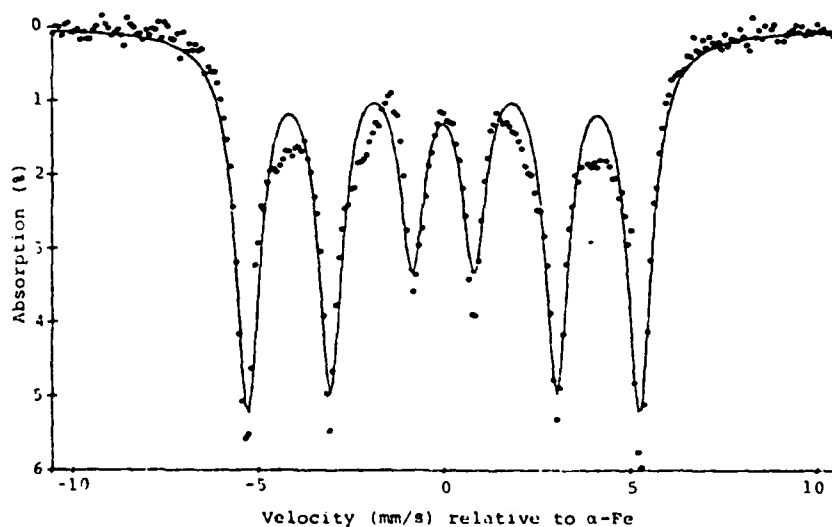


Figure 6. Mössbauer spectrum of powdered polycrystalline iron whiskers. The solid line represents the constrained least squares fit described in ref. 24.

show the presence of other species. The widths of the six major peaks are essentially the same. The spectrum of sample 2 differs from that of sample 1 only in the line widths. This difference is due to the greater line width of the Cr source.

Perhaps the most startling conclusion to be drawn from these spectra is that essentially none of the carbon in the whiskers is in the form of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{C}$ . Other carbides are likely present, however, and probably account for the small peaks in the region between the major peaks. The broadening of the major peaks is most likely caused by superparamagnetism. This indicates that the very small grain size observed in the tiny precursors of whiskers is found throughout larger whiskers as well. The broadening is probably not caused by a distribution of magnetic fields because the six lines have equal widths. The similarity of the spectra in Figure 6 indicates that the direction of magnetization of the magnetic domains in this material is essentially random.<sup>24</sup>

The whiskers used in this study were produced by the decomposition of  $\text{Fe}(\text{CO})_5$  in a magnetic field of 0.13T. Whisker growth was initiated at 265°C and within 3 minutes reduced to 200°C; the run was completed after 31 minutes at 200°C.  $\text{N}_2$  and  $\text{CO}_2$  were used as carrier gases.

A similar Mössbauer study was conducted at the National Bureau of Standards.\* Also, a whisker sample produced at the University of Virginia was being used, although it was made in the original Schladitz machine. The difference between the two specimens can be traced to using different carrier gases and different decomposition temperatures. The results obtained by the NBS were different from our own study in that carbon was found to have

\* Private communication by D. S. Lashmore, L. J. Swartzendruber and L. H. Bennett.

combined with Fe to  $\text{Fe}_3\text{C}$ . It was calculated that  $18 \pm 2\%$  of carbon atoms were tied up in iron carbide.

We have checked the results obtained at the NBS and an opportunity was given the NBS group to review our investigation. There is mutual agreement that the samples tested were different. Electron diffraction patterns taken from these specimens recently also showed differences. It is now clear that the composition and distribution of microprecipitates in the whiskers depends on both decomposition temperature as well as on the specific carrier gases used.

#### E. Microstructural Changes at Elevated Temperature

The unique microstructure of the CVD steel whiskers is due to its "assembly" between  $280^\circ\text{C}$  and  $200^\circ\text{C}$  which is nearly an order of magnitude lower than going from the melt through a solidification process. Annealing experiments were designed to study changes in the microstructure. The questions that were to be answered first relate to the growth of  $\alpha\text{-Fe}$  crystallites as well as to the rearrangements in microdispersion with a possible phase change. Schladitz<sup>11</sup> and Dawihl and Eicke<sup>9</sup> had reported a reduction of hardness after annealing at  $300^\circ\text{C}$  which was found to lower the original value of  $1,450 \text{ Kg/mm}^2$  to  $550 \text{ Kg/mm}^2$  after annealing for 15 minutes at  $500^\circ\text{C}$ . Also, our X-ray diffraction results indicated that a heat treatment at  $500^\circ\text{C}$  produced either an increase of the amount of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{C}$  or the agglomeration of small clusters to larger crystals.

It was thought that in-situ annealing experiments in the Philips EM 400 would be the best approach to obtain the required information. Firstly, the high resolution of the instrument would permit a recording of the microstructural changes in great detail and secondly, chemical changes could be followed by electron diffraction. A series of experiments was conducted raising the

temperature slowly up to and beyond the transformation point, obtaining the FCC structure of iron which was recorded at the completion of the run.<sup>25</sup> Noticeable changes in the grain size took place at temperatures above 500°C. For example, raising the temperature to 550°C for 10 to 15 minutes resulted in a grain size of the  $\alpha$ -Fe crystallites to about double the size of the original structure. Further, another significant observation could be made: the mottled contrast in electron transparable grains which is characteristic for the original steel whiskers, had almost disappeared. Electron diffraction patterns were taken with each group of micrographs, so that microstructural changes could be correlated with chemical changes. Some details of the TEM study follow.

Since the typical temperature range for whisker production is between 160°C and 270°C, it must be expected that some or all of the foreign inclusions are metastable. If indeed this would be so, changes in the electron diffraction patterns could be expected at temperatures above the growth temperature of the whiskers. In-situ annealing experiments up to 920°C were conducted. The first noticeable change in the whisker grain size took place at about 550°C. Diffraction patterns taken at 550°C and 569°C contain diffraction rings of both  $\alpha$ -Fe and  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  and the rings of  $\alpha$ -Fe, respectively. The most obvious difference in the  $\alpha$ -Fe rings visible in the diffraction patterns at 550°C and 569°C is the number and size of the spots which make up the rings. Larger but fewer spots at 569°C indicate that grain growth took place between 550°C and 569°C. Remarkable is the absence of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  rings at the higher temperature. Annealing above the transformation temperature at 920°C produced the diffraction pattern of  $\gamma$ -Fe.

A sequence of four TEM micrographs taken during an in-situ anneal permits to follow the grain growth between 550°C and 920°C. At room tem-

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perature whiskers have a grain size between 5 nm and 30 nm with an average grain size between 10 nm and 20nm; contrast for individual grains is not uniform but many dark or light dots, depending on background, about 2 nm in diameter are discernable. Grain boundaries are poorly defined. Bringing the specimen to 550°C in 15 minutes and holding in at that temperature for 10 minutes indicates grain sizes between 10 nm and 70 nm with an average size of about 30 nm. Grain boundaries have become distinctly sharper. Thickness fringes are visible which are evidence for flat grain boundaries. Also, the mottled appearance of electron transparent grains has almost vanished. At 704°C little change in grain size occurred but grain boundaries have continued to sharpen and are now well defined. All grains are now electron transparent. The final micrograph was taken after an anneal of 920°C and cooling the specimen to room temperature within 4 minutes. Grains have grown to diameters of 0.1  $\mu\text{m}$  or larger, and their boundaries are sharp; however, precipitates are visible at or near the grain boundaries in some of the grains.

A careful examination of grain boundaries in high resolution TEM micrographs ( $\sim 1$  nm) reveals that the boundaries lack the usual definition. Although the grain boundaries must provide for orientation changes, they are not abrupt but can best be described as transitional regions having a width not less than the particles in the microdispersion and often appear to be wider. This concept excludes by its very nature the development of sharp grain boundary ledges. Often, grains do not meet at sharp nodal points but have rounded corners. At triple nodes one can observe occasionally through subtle contrast changes that additional material had been added where the three grains meet. No micro-porosity has ever been detected. This is understandable since the decomposition of  $\text{Fe}(\text{CO})_5$  under our growth conditions

takes place largely on the whisker surfaces leading to continuous surface diffusion during the growth process. Grain boundaries are often becoming visible in TEM investigations through fringe contrast (Murr<sup>26</sup>). However, this characteristic contrast was not seen in whiskers which is further evidence for poorly defined grain boundaries and for grains with non-planar boundaries. Only after annealing to 570°C and 704°C was fringe contrast observed, indicating the development of grains with planar boundaries.

#### F. Microstructural Observations Made on Thick Filaments

The TEM results obtained so far were from the transmission of electron transparent filaments, sticking out from thicker filaments. A new preparation technique was applied, to thin down thick filaments (20  $\mu\text{m}$ ) by ion sputtering. The data obtained in this fashion confirmed the general results described above but also permitted a number of new conclusions based on analytical high resolution TEM results.<sup>27</sup>

The grain size of  $\alpha\text{-Fe}$  inside the filaments comprises the same range as before, namely 30 nm to 5 nm; however, the range to lower values had to be extended to 3 and 2 nm. This is a most interesting result in that it brings down the  $\alpha\text{-Fe}$  grain size into the range of particles representing the microdispersion. SAD patterns confirmed the size of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  particles to be about 3-2 nm in agreement with earlier measurements. Center beam dark field techniques revealed a new distribution of iron grains. Often, they formed clusters with the grains having a similar crystallographic orientation. Again, grain boundaries were found to have a finite width between 1 and 2 nm. In general, it can be concluded that the microstructure is similar throughout the filaments as reported earlier, although special structures such as clustering came to light.

### G. Alloying of Cr to Fe Filaments

Attempts were made to alloy Cr to Fe by CVD techniques.<sup>21</sup> A study which successfully achieved such an alloying through the work of Moore yielded a number of interesting results and may serve as an indication that unexpected difficulties in the alloying process may be encountered.

As has been reported in the literature, steel whiskers produced according to the Schladitz CVD process are losing their strength in the temperature range between 400°C and 1,000°C, while chromium-steel whiskers would retain their strength to 23% of their initial strength at 1,000°C but the loss at 800°C would virtually be negligible.<sup>28</sup> This part of the study had as its objective (1) a confirmation of the above result; and (2) to provide an explanation for the strengthening in chromium alloyed steel whiskers at elevated temperatures.

The apparatus for the production of chromium containing iron whiskers is shown in Figure 7. Eight batches of chromium-iron whiskers were produced and analyzed. The research involved five major efforts:

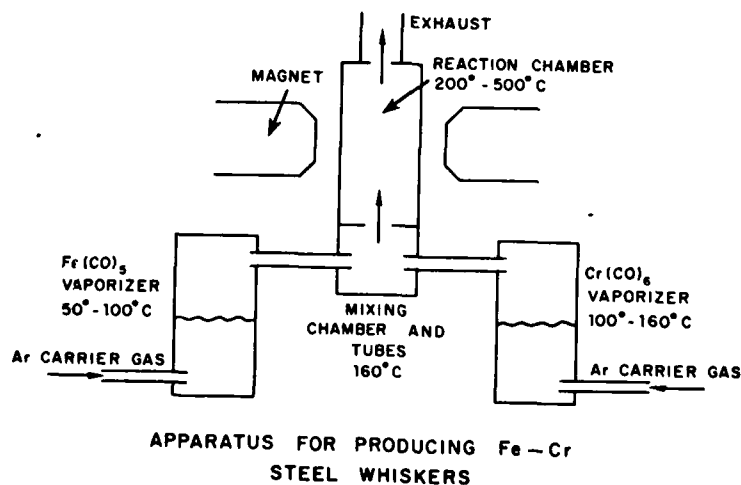


Figure 7. Diagram of filament producing apparatus using independent vaporization of carbonyls.

- (1) a determination of the chromium content in the whiskers
- (2) the determination of the whisker strength
- (3) the determination of the strength after annealing at 400, 600 and 800°C
- (4) the determination of the microstructure
- (5) the correlation between microstructure and strength

The experimental technique for the production of chromium containing whiskers has been described in detail in the dissertation by Thomas Moore.<sup>29</sup> On account of the difference in vapor pressures for the carbonyls of iron and chromium the whisker production in each batch was not uniform in respect to chromium content. The distribution of chromium in individual whiskers showed a very high chromium content in whiskers near the input end of the whisker collection screen and a much lower and more slowly decreasing chromium content in whiskers further from the input end. However, this result was reproducible and a typical distribution curve of chromium in individual whiskers is shown in Figure 8. This distribution implies a very rapid preferential deposition of chromium and a subsequent depletion of chromium carbonyl from the reactant vapor. The chromium containing whiskers were being grown by first producing a very thin pure iron core and then permitting the mix of iron and chromium carbonyls to produce the final whisker. As can be seen in Figure 9, the diameter of the whiskers also changed from a large diameter (approximately .9 mm) at the input edge to whiskers in the low micrometer range at the output edge. The average length of whiskers was on the order of 4 mm.

A quantitative X-ray analysis was carried out by an energy dispersive X-ray analyzer connected to a scanning electron microscope. Two major results have been obtained. Firstly, as the chromium content of the whiskers

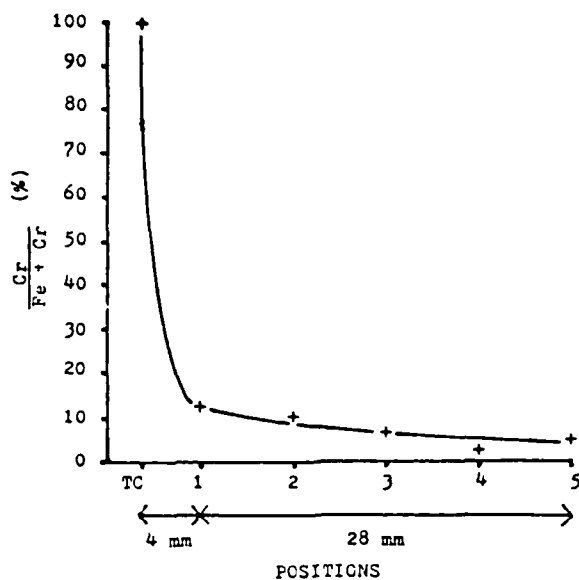


Figure 8. Distribution of chromium in individual whiskers for Experiment #5 expressed by the intensity ratio, in percent, of Cr K radiation intensity over the sum of the Fe and Cr K radiation intensities. Position TC signifies a point on the reaction chamber thermocouple shaft about 4mm before the input edge of the collection screen. Position 1 denotes the input edge of the collection screen and subsequent positions were spaced at 7 mm intervals along the central axis of the reaction chamber with position 5 denoting the output edge of the collection screen.

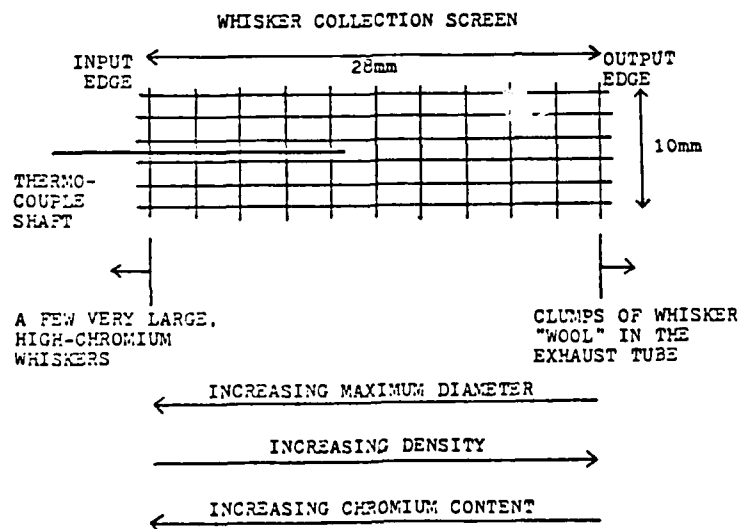


Figure 9. Description of the major characteristics of alloy whisker growth on the collection screens used in this study.

was increased, the fraction of the total mass of the sample volume that was being detected decreased continuously to approximately 75% in the chromium whiskers. Secondly, this decrease in the fraction detected was independent of the heat treatment. Due to absorption of lower energy X-rays by the beryllium window of the detector the technique is insensitive to elements of atomic number less than 11. From a consideration of the elements present during whisker growth and from the X-ray diffraction analysis, the elements that would be expected to make up the difference in mass are carbon and oxygen. Assuming that the carbon content in chromium containing steel whiskers is the same as in pure steel whiskers, namely 1.5 weight percent, one would expect that the difference is primarily being made up by oxygen. One can deduce from the phase diagram of chromium and oxygen that  $\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3$  is primarily the oxide that exists between room temperature and  $1,000^\circ\text{C}$ . With this information in mind, an analysis was made of a pure iron whisker and a whisker which substantially consisted of chromium.

Table III<sup>(a)</sup> shows the computer analysis results of a whisker that is almost entirely composed of iron; the calculations indicate a 1.6% Cr composition. The fit is very good and there is no reason to expect that significant amounts of any other elements are present. However, as the chromium content increases, the total weight-percent-analyzed figure drops continuously. Table III<sup>(b)</sup> shows the results of two analyses of what is essentially a chromium whisker with an iron core. The first analysis, for iron and chromium only, calculated 72% Cr and 3.1% Fe for a total of approximately 75% analyzed. The second analysis, assuming oxygen by difference, provided 75% Cr, 3.1% Fe, and 22% O. Then, as directed, the program assumed that all of the chromium was present in the oxide and calculated that 109% of the mass analyzed was  $\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3$ . Obviously, this indicates that the chromium is not entirely

TABLE III<sup>(a)</sup>

Comparison Between X-Ray Analyses for Whiskers  
Containing Different Amounts of Cr

Fit[0.00 -> 20.47]

6/26 Spec B

100 Secs CHISQD = 0.81

Drift Factor 1.000

Ref .S CR-K FE-K

ZAF Correction

Drift Factor 1.000

Iter 1

----	K	[Z]	[A]	[F]	[ZAF]	CONC
CR-K	0.022	0.995	1.016	0.730	0.739	0.016
FE-K	0.981	1.000	1.004	1.000	1.005	0.987

Total = 1.003

(a) Computer printout for an almost entirely iron whisker.

TABLE III<sup>(b)</sup>

Comparison Between X-Ray Analyses for Whiskers  
Containing Different Amounts of Cr

Fit [0.00 -> 20.47]

6/26 Spec 9

100 Secs CHISQD = 1.31

Drift Factor 1.000

Ref .S CR-K FE-K

ZAF Correction

Drift Factor 1.000

Iter 1

----	K	[Z]	[A]	[F]	[ZAF]	CONC
CR-K	0.723	0.999	1.000	0.994	0.995	0.721
FE-K	0.023	1.004	1.297	1.000	1.303	0.031

Total = 0.751

Ref .S CR-K FE-K

ZAF Correction

Drift Factor 1.000

Iter 2

----	K	[Z]	[A]	[F]	[ZAF]	CONC
CR-K	0.723	1.045	0.994	0.995	1.034	0.748
FE-K	0.023	1.050	1.233	1.000	1.295	0.031
O -K	0.049	0.892	4.965	0.999	4.431	0.221 D

Total = 1.000

Oxide Results

Cr<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> 1.093

Fe 0.030

Total = 1.124

(b) computer printout for a whisker being almost entirely chromium.

combined in the oxide. Another approach is to assume that all of the oxygen is present in the oxide. A calculation involving the respective atomic weights shows that if 22% of the total mass analyzed is oxygen, then 48% of the total mass analyzed must be chromium combined with the oxygen in  $\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3$ . The calculated concentration of chromium in the analysis was 75%. Therefore, 27% of the total mass analyzed must be composed of chromium in ferrite or carbide, and 64% of the amount present is involved in the oxide. The total weight-percent-analyzed is then the sum of: 70%  $\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3$ , 27% Cr, and 3.1% Fe. This is a total of approximately 100%.

This calculation supports the assumptions that in chromium whiskers oxygen composes most of the balance of the total mass present and that essentially all of the oxygen is present in the oxide. The continuous decrease in the fraction of the total mass analyzed resulting from iron and chromium compositions as the chromium content is increased, indicates that the incorporation of oxygen into the deposit is directly related to the deposition of chromium. In the low to moderate alloy compositions a chromium-rich surface layer of cubic magnetite is expected.

As added evidence that the oxygen believed present in the chromium-alloyed whiskers is not a result of oxidation during heat-treatment, the composition analysis result for a chromium whisker heat-treated at 800°C in ultra-high-purity hydrogen is also plotted in Figure 10.

The microstructure of Fe whiskers looked similar to that of whiskers produced in the Schladitz machine, i.e. ring-like structures centered around the core of the whiskers after etching with NITOL. Similar ring patterns were seen in whiskers alloyed with Cr.

The microstructures of Fe-C whiskers and Fe-Cr-C whiskers are very similar. Even at very high Cr content the grain size remains in the 8 nm - 30 nm range as is known from Fe-C whiskers.

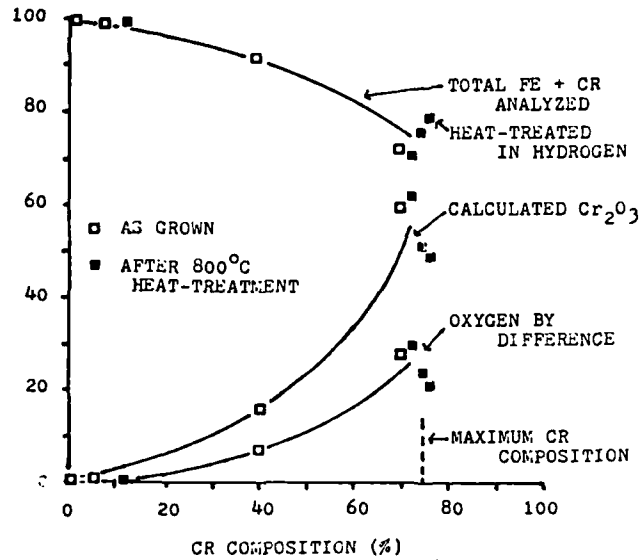


Figure 10. Relationship between the fraction of the total mass analyzed by energy-dispersive X-ray analysis and the chromium concentration in alloy whiskers. All ZAF corrections made assuming oxygen by difference.

Fe-Cr-C whiskers were annealed at 400°C, 600°C, and 800°C for 15 minutes in evacuated tubes. The structural changes during heat treatment were monitored by X-ray diffraction and by scanning electron microscopy. Observations by the latter showed that the etched cross-section of whiskers showed an increase of roundish small particles with increasing temperature and with increasing Cr content at each temperature. X-ray diffraction patterns revealed that drastic structural changes occurred during the three temperature treatments. At 400°C the pure metal ferrite phase and  $M_3C$  were present. At 600°C the ferrite phase and cementite were joined by  $Cr_2O_3$ . With increasing Cr content in the whiskers the first two phases were reduced while  $Cr_2O_3$  increased. At 800°C the ferrite phase is present as well as  $M_3C$  and now  $\alpha-M_3O_4$  was also observed. SEM pictures showed etched surfaces of ferrite grains and pearlite. A 40% Cr filament showed a replacement of cemen-

tite by  $(\text{Cr,Fe})_7\text{C}_3$ . Other structures in 40% Cr filaments are the ferrite phase and  $\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3$ .

As expected, these structural changes affected the filaments' strength. A summary of the results of microhardness tests is given in Figure 11, based on average values. An addition of Cr to Fe-C whiskers reduces the microhardness somewhat. A 400°C heat treatment keeps the microhardness in the same range, namely between 700 and 1,000  $\text{Kg/mm}^2$  ( $\sim 10\text{GPa}$ ). 600°C and 800°C anneals reduce the microhardness of Fe-Cr-C whiskers to 500  $\text{Kg/mm}^2$  and 175  $\text{Kg/mm}^2$  respectively. After the 600°C anneal only 50% Cr containing whisker recovered their original strength but with increasing Cr content the microhardness went up to about 1,000  $\text{Kg/mm}^2$  (this is the strength of Fe-Cr whiskers as grown). Annealing at 800°C results in strength reduction below the 600°C anneal values for whiskers containing 5-50% Cr. However, the microhardness is increasing rapidly for 65-70% Cr containing whiskers to about 2,000  $\text{Kg/mm}^2$ . A maximum value of 2,600  $\text{Kg/mm}^2$  has been recorded;

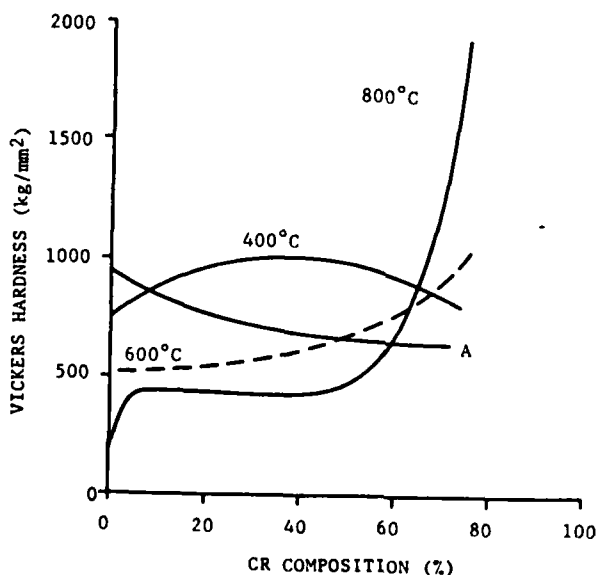


Figure 11. Microhardness as a function of composition for chromium-alloyed filaments heat-treated at 800°C. A = as grown.

this corresponds to a fracture strength of 8.6 GPa. Figure 12 summarizes the average microhardness vs. annealing temperature.

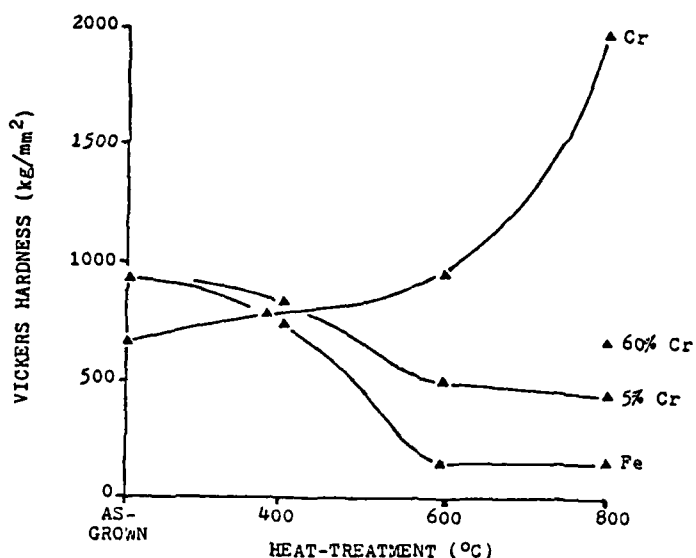


Figure 12. Microhardness vs. temperatures of heat-treatment for representative compositions.

The thermal decomposition of a mix of  $\text{Fe}(\text{CO})_5$  and  $\text{Cr}(\text{CO})_6$  vapors in a magnetic field led to the production of Cr containing Fe-C whiskers. The yield of one run provided whiskers from very low to very high Cr content in a reproducible fashion. Results from energy dispersive X-ray analyses showed that considerable amounts of oxides and carbides were incorporated into the whiskers, their amounts depending on the whiskers' Cr content. This growth behavior differs considerably from the growth mechanism of Fe-C whiskers; it is concluded that the decomposition of  $\text{Cr}(\text{CO})_6$  is accelerated by  $\text{H}_2$  in comparison to the decomposition of  $\text{Fe}(\text{CO})_5$ . An equally important factor is the reduction of the diffusion of carbon in  $\alpha\text{-Fe}$  in the presence of Cr, leading to a different microstructure. These two conclusions are supported by independent reports in the literature.

Since the growth temperature was 250°C it is obvious that some of the phases must be in a metastable equilibrium. The heat treatments reported at 400°C, 600°C, and 800°C confirm this contention. With increasing temperatures  $\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3$  and  $(\text{Cr,Fe})_7\text{C}_3$  were seen by X-ray diffraction in whiskers containing high Cr contents. Naturally, this increased the microhardness in proportion to the percentage of the oxides and carbides. Practically then, the high Cr content whiskers were more like a ceramic substance than an alloy. This explanation is backed up by the hardness of  $\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_3$  (2940 Kg/mm<sup>2</sup>) and  $\text{Cr}_7\text{C}_3$  (1136 Kg/mm<sup>2</sup>) if taken in proper proportions and allowing that the rule of mixtures is applicable (the average microhardness for a chromium whisker after annealing at 800°C was approximately 2000 Kg/mm<sup>2</sup>). However, 2.5% Cr containing Fe whiskers do not retain their original strength after an 800°C anneal as has been claimed in the literature. The error arose by determining the chemical composition from a large amount of whiskers\* which, as has been demonstrated in our investigation, have varying amounts of Cr if prepared by mixing and decomposing  $\text{Cr}(\text{CO})_6$  and  $\text{Fe}(\text{CO})_5$  vapors.

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\* Personal Communication by H. Schladitz

### SECTION III

### CONCLUSIONS

Polycrystalline steel whiskers produced by a CVD technique in the presence of a magnetic field are to date the strongest polycrystalline alloys. Tensile strengths of up to 6 GPa have been measured at the University of Virginia by Lashmore (1977), and Schladitz (1968) reported values approaching 8 GPa. The structural details described in the previous chapter do not fit into any microstructural pattern known to exist in steels or, as a matter of fact, in any other alloys. The microstructure has been characterized through experimental findings as follows:

- (i) Extremely small grain size (5 nm to 30 nm)
- (ii) Lack of long range crystallinity within grains
- (iii) Microdispersion of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ ,  $\text{Fe}_3\text{C}$ ,  $\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  and possibly carbon particles
- (iv) Very diffuse grain boundaries

The four points made above have important implications in regard to the mechanical strengthening mechanism in the alloy. The most significant deviation of the CVD produced steel in comparison to alloys obtained by solidification is the lack of long range crystallinity as shown by field ion microscopy. On the other hand,  $\alpha\text{-Fe}$  rings in electron diffraction patterns are composed largely of spots of varying sizes with some continuous intensity in the rings, i.e. both large and very small coherently diffracting volume elements consisting of  $\alpha\text{-Fe}$  are present with particles of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ ,  $\text{Fe}_3\text{C}$ ,  $\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  and possibly carbon particles. The distribution of C remains obscure at this time, since only a small amount seems to be bonded to Fe as  $\text{Fe}_3\text{C}$ .

This investigation has clarified that the high strength of CVD steel whiskers is not due to the known strengthening mechanisms in alloys such as

solid solution hardening or second phase hardening. Instead, one has to conclude that the whiskers represent an assembly of particles of not more than 8 to 10 atomic diameters consisting of alpha-iron, iron oxides, iron carbides and carbon. Alpha-iron can be considered as the matrix holding the assembly together. It is indicated that the  $\alpha$ -Fe grains are bonded together by multiple phase regions. On account of the nature of the growth conditions of this steel, it can be assumed that the very small particles in the microdispersion have concentration gradients which allows the conclusion that a mix of metallic bonds and covalent bonds exists in these transition regions that occupy possibly one-half of the whisker volume. The bond arrangement described would constitute the primary strengthening mechanism. The small grain size of the material and the absence of sharp grain boundaries provide for a more continuous microstructure largely free of the conventional interfaces present in solidified alloys. It is the combination of this feature combined with the specific bonding mix in transition regions which provide for the exceptional strength of this steel.

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