

2018 AIAA Propulsion and Energy Forum  
Duke Energy Center Cincinnati Oh, 8-11 July, 2018.

# Catalytic Augmentation of an Arc-Ignited Hydrogen Peroxide/ABS Hybrid Rocket System

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The authors have collaborated with an industry partner to develop a prototype upper stage for a dedicated nano-launch vehicle. In addition to providing sufficient impulse for orbit insertion, the unique motor system also provides capability for multiple restarts; allowing operation as an orbital maneuvering thruster. The hybrid motor design uses 85%-90% hydrogen peroxide solution and 3-D printed ABS as propellants. In the original system design the peroxide catalyst bed was completely removed and a patented arc-ignition system thermally ignited the propellants. The thermal ignition system was effective but resulted in a combustion latency of approximately 1-second, reducing overall performance and allowing for significant variability in the delivered total impulse. This work investigates whether adding a small catalyst pack for ignition augmentation can eliminate or significantly reduce the observed ignition latency and improve overall system performance. The effectiveness of multiple catalytic minerals including potassium permanganate, manganese dioxide, manganese (III) oxide, and potassium nitrate were examined and compared to traditional noble-metal catalyst materials like silver or platinum. These alternative materials are significantly less expensive than noble metals. Catalytic activity test results, designs for an augmentation catbed integrated with the thermal ignition system, and preliminary unaugmented and augmented hot-fire test results are presented.

## I. Nomenclature

$A$	= Arrhenius equation scale factor, $mol/sec$
$A_c$	= cross-sectional area of the mesh, $m^2$
$A_{screen}$	= projected 2-D total area in screen mesh, $cm^2$
$A_{shp}$	= surface area of sphere with equivalent volume to test specimen, $cm^2$
$A_{wire}$	= projected 2-D wire area in screen mesh, $cm^2$
$CSI$	= contact surface index, $mm^2$
$D_{alumina}$	= alumina pellet diameter, $1/8$ in ( $0.3175$ cm)
$D_{pellet}$	= effective diameter of coated pellet, $cm$
$D_{wire}$	= wire strand diameter, $cm$
$f$	= peroxide mass concentration
$E_a$	= energy of activation, $kJ/mol$ .
$I_{sp}$	= specific impulse, $s$
$k$	= rate of reaction, $M/s$
$L_{alumina}$	= alumina pellet length, $1/4$ in ( $0.635$ cm)
$L_c$	= catalyst pack length, $m$
$L_{pellet}$	= effective length of coated pellet, $cm$

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$L_{wire}$	= effective wire strand length, <i>cm</i>
$M$	= number of empty areas per linear inch in wire mesh screen, <i>in ()</i>
$M$	= propellant mass, <i>kg</i>
$\delta M_{O_2}$	= mass of oxygen released from peroxide decomposition, <i>g</i>
$M_w$	= molecular weight, <i>J/kg-K</i>
$M$	= solution molality, <i>moles/g</i>
$m$	= residual mass of reactant, <i>g</i>
$\dot{m}$	= mass flow rate, <i>kg/s</i>
$m_p$	= particle mass, <i>g</i>
$n$	= number of moles
$P_c$	= combustion chamber pressure downstream of injector, <i>kPa</i>
$P_{exit}$	= catbed exit pressure upstream of injector, <i>kPa</i>
$\delta P_{O_2}$	= pressure change due to oxygen released from peroxide decomposition, <i>g</i>
$R_u$	= universal gas constant, <i>8314.4612 J/mol-K</i>
$R_g$	= gas constant for oxygen, <i>J/kg-K</i>
$S$	= Arrhenius equation curve-fit, slope
$T$	= temperature of reaction, <i>K</i>
$T_0$	= combustion chamber temperature, <i>K</i>
$V_c$	= ullage volume of reaction chamber, <i>cm<sup>3</sup></i>
$V_p$	= particle volume, <i>cm<sup>3</sup></i>
$V_{wire}$	= volume of a wire strand, <i>cm<sup>3</sup></i>
$W$	= empty area between wire strands in a mesh.
$Y_0$	= Arrhenius equation curve-fit, y-intercept
$\Delta E_a$	= energy of activation, <i>kJ/mol</i>
$\Delta t$	= residence time, <i>s</i>
$\eta$	= decomposition efficiency
$\eta^*$	= characteristic velocity efficiency
$\rho$	= material density, <i>g/cm<sup>3</sup></i>
$\rho_{soln}$	= decomposed peroxide solution density, <i>g/cm<sup>3</sup></i>
$\mu$	= viscosity, <i>Pa-s</i>

## II. Introduction

Although the market for commercially designed and manufactured small spacecraft has grown enormously during the last decade, technology development has mostly centered on spacecraft bus design and miniaturization of sensor components. The space-launch industry has generally not kept pace with the growth trend. With the current state-of-the-art, the only available for small commercial, commercial or academic payloads to reach orbit is by "rideshare."

A "rideshare" is defined as a secondary payload, smaller in size and weight than the primary payload, that is placed into orbit by a launch vehicle that is mostly paid for by the primary sponsor. Because the sponsor pays the lion's share of the launch costs, the secondary payload receives a substantially reduced launch price in exchange for trade-offs with regard to the payload's final orbit and launch schedule. These tradeoffs typically include having little or no control over the launch date and time, the final orbital parameters, or the ability to halt the launch and remove the payload should a payload failure occur during ground processing prior to launch.

Only a few specialized launch vehicles have upper stages with the ability for in-space restarts; these are typically reserved for expensive government-owned reconnaissance, communications, or command & control satellites. For existing rideshare launch opportunities, nano-scale spacecraft are delivered to orbit as passive payloads and must accept whatever orbit they achieve during the deployment process. Currently, "rideshare" services are primarily provided by the DoD/NASA Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicle (EELV) using its secondary payload adapter (ESPA).<sup>‡</sup> SpaceX has also offered some secondary payload slots on its Falcon 9 launches; but these opportunities are limited.<sup>§</sup> So unfortunately, with the current state of world launch capability, inadequate low earth orbit (LEO) "rideshare" launch opportunities are available to accommodate the demand for these NanoSat demonstration missions. Secondary payloads, especially in the nanosat class, with little or no ability determine their deployment orbit, will remain a novelty with little means to accomplish serious scientific, strategic, or commercial missions.

Finally, even when flown as secondary payloads, NanoSat launch costs are extremely high and are commercially prohibitive. Current launch costs are high for a variety of reasons, with human and environmental safety concerns being very high on this list. Clearly, a dedicated Nanosat launch vehicle is required to reduce costs and provide the required LEO access for NanoSats to achieve practical utility. This vehicle design must address the issues that make traditional launch costs so prohibitive. The activity to be reported by this paper was initiated in response to the above-described nano-launch challenge. Restartable, high performing launch vehicle stages in the 25-250 kg payload size class are not currently commercially available. The proposed hybrid "green-propellant" systems offer significant advantages over competing technologies in the areas of cost, safety, and mission capability. The resulting technology will fulfill the ever-growing mission demands of the extensive NanoSat market by enabling dedicated launch for CubeSat scale payloads.

## A. Hybrid Rockets as a Green Propulsion Alternative

The inherent safety and environmental friendliness of hybrid rocket systems have been known for several decades. [1] Hybrids have the potential to act as an ideal "green" alternative to hydrazine. Historically, due to the lack of a reliable non-pyrotechnic, multiple-use ignition method, hybrid rockets have never been seriously considered as feasible for in-space propulsion. However, as will be described later in Section III of this paper, this issue has been overcome by leveraging the unique electrical breakdown properties of certain 3-D printed thermoplastics. [2] The associated arc-ignition concept has been developed into a power-efficient ignition system that can be started, stopped, and restarted with a high degree of reliability.

Hybrid rockets offer particular utility for the upper stages of a nano-launch vehicle. Although a hybrid rocket will increase the overall system dry mass compared to a solid-propellant motor, the capabilities to throttle, shut-down on demand, coast, and relight the motor, will offset any loss in performance of the stage. Such a "smart-stage" would not only provide  $\Delta V$  to enable the payload to reach orbit; but can also serve as an on-orbit maneuvering system that allows precise placement of the payload. Finally, orbital debris due to abandoned spacecraft is becoming a huge issue. It is likely that United Nations regulations will soon demand active end-of-lifetime deorbit. The system to be investigated here may also provide on-orbit maintenance or end-of-lifetime de-orbit capability. [3]

Previously, the authors of this report have experienced considerable success with small spacecraft systems using gaseous oxygen (GOX) and 3-D printed thermoplastics like acrylonitrile-butadiene-styrene (ABS) as the propellants. [4], [5] However, GOX was rejected for this upper-stage application due to its low density, required storage pressures, and significant potential for fire hazards when stored in significant quantities at high pressures.

Due to its high density, hydrogen peroxide ( $H_2O_2$ ) was considered to be very promising oxidizer for this application. In order to achieve comparable density to  $H_2O_2$ , GOX would need to be stored at pressures above 10,000 psi. During this investigation USU has built a prototype 1/4th scale motor and with a novel non-catalytic ignition

<sup>‡</sup> Perry, B., "ESPA: An Inexpensive Ride to Space for Secondary Payloads," *MilsatMagazine*, July 2012, <http://www.milsatmagazine.com/story.php?number=797849281>, [Retrieved 28 November 2017].

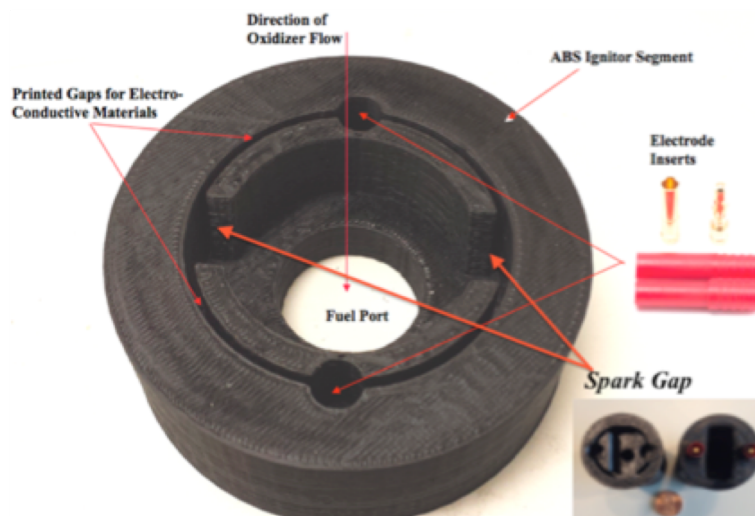
<sup>§</sup> Foust, J., "New Opportunities for Smallsat Launches" *The Space Review*, 22 August, 2011, <http://www.thespacereview.com/article/1913/1>, [Retrieved 28 November 2017].

system in order to gain experience with using peroxide in hybrid rocket system designs. This paper reports on the development and testing of that prototype system. Primary emphases are placed on ensuring reliable ignition, characterizing performance and enhancing the system performance, and developing regression rate curves. As occurs with other hybrid motors, the  $H_2O_2$ /ABS motor can throttle and execute multiple restarts. These features make it an excellent candidate for an upper stage launch vehicle due to its ability to give multiple and precise  $\Delta v$ 's to enable the payload to achieve its desired orbit, and then make necessary maneuvers during its mission.

## B. Review of Electrical Arc-Ignition Technology

The Propulsion Research Laboratory at Utah State University has recently initiated development of a novel one-quarter scale hybrid rocket stage-motor that employs medium grade hydrogen peroxide (85%) and additively-manufactured ABS as propellants. [6] The thruster system was adapted from previous "Green" hybrid systems designed and tested at USU. [4] For this prototype motor, the hydrogen peroxide was directly injected into the fuel grain port using a commercial hollow-cone 50-degree nozzle to atomize the oxidizer. Using Utah State's patented Arc-Ignition system, the ABS was pyrolyzed by directing a high voltage through a 3D printed ignitor cap made of ABS. To initiate the decomposition of the hydrogen peroxide, a short pre-lead fire of GOX was used to warm the fuel grain, and raise the combustion chamber port prior to peroxide injection. This approach prevents super-cooling downstream of the liquid injection point, and also provides enough activation energy to start the decomposition process.

The alternative-ignition approach to be presented here leverages the patented arc-ignition system developed for hybrid rockets by Utah State University. [7], [8] The arc-ignition technology derives from the electrical breakdown properties of certain 3-D printed thermoplastics like Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene (ABS), Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE) and High-Impact-Polystyrene (HIPS). These properties were discovered serendipitously while



**Figure 1. Additively-Manufactured Fuel Grain with Integrated Electrode Paths.**

Two electrodes, insulated by industry standard ESC connectors,\*\* are embedded into the top face of the fuel grain. Dual redundant, solid-core copper wires are routed from the electrodes to small gaps located on the impingement shelves. The wires are insulated and protected from flame by 3-D printed circular "slots" that insert into the electrode wire gaps. The conducting paths terminate facing each other, flush with the combustion port surface, and exposed to the interior of the combustion chamber.

When an electrostatic potential is placed across the electrodes, charges flow from the energized electrode causing a localized electrostatic breakdown of the fuel material. This breakdown allows the charges to carve a path through

\*\* Anon., "Motor to ESC Connectors," <https://www.motionrc.com/collections/motor-to-esc-connectors>, [Retrieved 6 June 2017].

the material. The resulting arc-track completes the circuit path to return electrode. [13] Current flowing through the material causes Joule heating and pyrolyzes some of the material hydrocarbons. Ignition of the pyrolyzed fuel vapors occurs as soon as oxidizer flow is initiated. The initial arc-track can be pre-set by doping the surface with graphite powder. Once a surface arc-path has been set, graphite doping is no longer required. Depending on the arc-path length, typical impedances across the material between the wire leads lies in the range from  $100k\Omega$  to  $2.5 M\Omega$ . Identical ABS fuel segments made from extruded/machined ABS or similar thermo-plastics do not exhibit the observed arcing properties. Thus, 3-D printing is an essential requirement of the system.

### III. Background on the Thermal Decomposition of $H_2O_2$ using Arc-Ignition System

In this approach the peroxide flow is pre-lead by a small flow of gaseous oxygen injected into a combustion chamber lined with the 3-D printed ABS fuel. The arc-ignition system weakly initiates combustion between the injected oxygen and the fuel source, and is followed by the peroxide flow. Previous studies have demonstrated that GOX/ABS combustion generates temperatures exceeding  $2800\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ , and specific enthalpies greater than  $8.5\text{ MJ/kg}$ . Thus, with the properly tuned GOX pre-lead massflow, there exists sufficient energy to decompose the incoming peroxide flow, while simultaneously initiating full-length hybrid combustion. Once peroxide decomposition begins, then the additional energy of decomposition contributes to the overall combustion process. After the GOX pre-lead is terminated, Combustion is sustained by the oxygen liberated by the thermal decomposition of the peroxide.

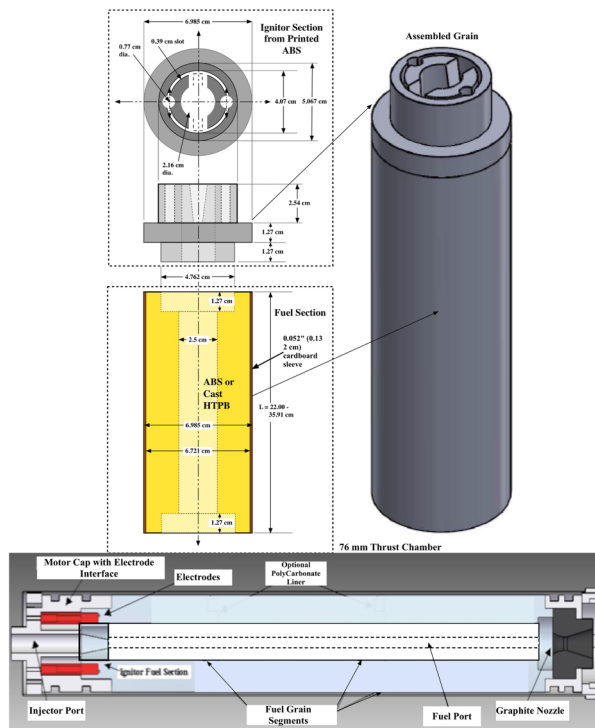


Figure 2. Schematic of 3-D Printed Ignitor, Extruded ABS Lower Grain Segment, and Thrust Chamber.

as opposed to the 3-D printed material. This approach resulted in considerable cost savings with no reduction in performance. The small 3-D printed cap section provided more than sufficient fuel pyrolysis to seed the flow with hydrocarbon vapor and initiate combustion.

Figure 2 shows the fuel grain and thrust chamber design features. The thrust chamber was developed from a 76 mm hobby-rocket motor case with a graphite nozzle and retainer system. These components were well characterized during a

### C. Fuel Grain Design

Previous arc-ignition test prototypes have manufactured the entire fuel grain using 3-D printing. However, due to the associated costs of 3-D printing and the large volume of material that would be required for this testing campaign, only a small ignitor cap section was 3-D printed for each grain. The printed cap was bonded to an extruded ABS rod, machined to fit the appropriate dimensions, to complete the fuel grain. With this change the majority of the fuel grain volume consisted of the significantly cheaper extruded material,

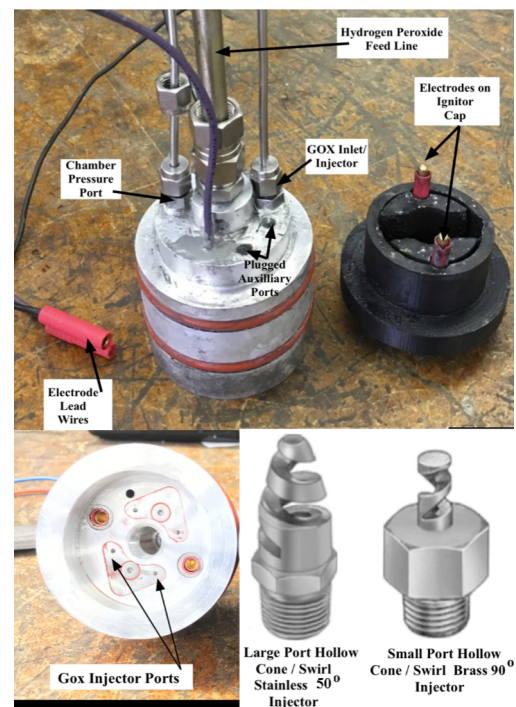


Figure 3. Injector Cap, Ignition Cap, GOX Injector, and Peroxide Injector Designs.

previous research campaign.<sup>14</sup> The ignitor grain segments were manufactured on a Stratasys Dimension® 1200es 3D FDM printer<sup>††</sup> using their standard-grade ABS stock material. The electrodes were manually installed into the assembly and the fuel grains and sealed with the printed "slots" described earlier. The fuel grains were completed by bonding the 3-D printed caps into the lower extruded sections using commercial grade ABS pipe joint cement. The ignitor grain segments were printed fully dense to match the extruded ABS material density of approximately 0.970 g/cm<sup>3</sup>. Each ignitor grain segment weighed approximately 110 grams. The ABS grains were machined down to fit the 76 mm chamber from a 3" diameter extruded rod. The bonded grains were press-fit inserted into the motor case with no insulating sleeve. The extruded ABS grain segments weighed approximately 700 grams each. Each completed fuel grain weighed approximately 810 grams.

#### D. Peroxide and GOX Injector Designs

Following guidance offered by Anthione et al. [15] a hollow-cone injector swirl injector was used in order to effectively atomize the peroxide flow and provide for positive impingement against the fuel port walls. In order to evenly mix the ignitor GOX flow into the peroxide stream, a symmetrically-distributed GOX injector was machined into the motor cap. Figure 3 shows the motor and ignitor caps and the peroxide and GOX injector configurations. Both large and small port peroxide injectors were successfully tested. The small port configuration produced the greatest pressure drop and overall motor burn stability; however, it suffered from a significantly reduced burn lifetime compared to the larger injector.

#### E. Summary of Initial Peroxide/ABS Arc-Ignition Test Results

As described previously, the initial phase of the development campaign examined various hardware permutation in order to understand the configuration elements that were essential to establishing reliable and repeatable ignition sequences using only thermal ignition. [16] During this testing campaign, the GOX valve and ignition spark were set to pre-lead the peroxide valve opening by 2 seconds. The GOX valve would remain open for two seconds after the peroxide valve was opened. This approach allowed multiple full-ignitions to be reliably achieved. For later tests the GOX pre-lead was shortened to 1 seconds with no deleterious effects. Finally, the post-peroxide GOX shutoff was shortened from to- to one-second. This change significantly affected the ignition reliability.

For all burns the peroxide valve was opened at time zero, and remained opened until all of the liquid in the 2-liter peroxide run tank was exhausted. In order to achieve a wider variety of massflux rates during this burn series, the *peroxide* injector feed pressure  $p_f$  was varied by manually adjusting the regulator output over a range from 200 to 250 psig. The resulting injector feed pressure varied over a range from 180 to 200 psia. Refs. [6] and [16] describe the test apparatus and procedures in detail. All tests were performed at ambient pressure background conditions.

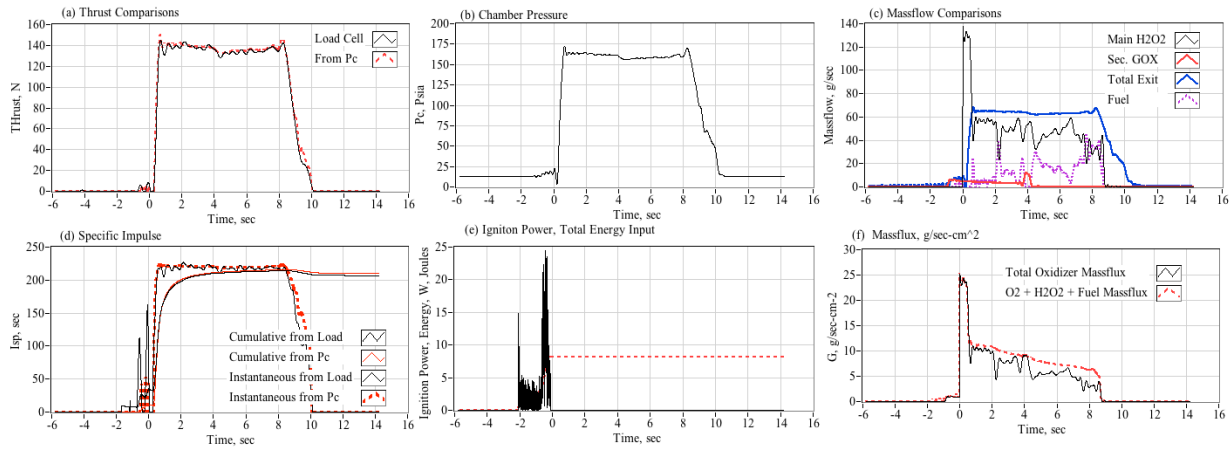
Figure 4 shows a typical arc-ignition time history where a 3-D printed ABS fuel grain is burned with an 88% hydrogen peroxide solution. Plotted are (a) directly measured (load cell) thrust and thrust calculated from chamber pressure using the De Laval flow equations, (b) chamber pressure, (c) GOX, peroxide, nozzle exit, and fuel massflow rates, (d) cumulative and instantaneous specific impulse values as calculated using both measured and calculated thrust levels, (e) input power and energy levels, and (f) the oxidizer and total massflux through the fuel port. Notice the large oxidizer massflow spike that precedes the rise in chamber pressure.

Note the large initial spike in oxidizer massflow that occurs before the rise in the chamber pressure. This spike results from a "wet" flow where unburned peroxide solution injected into the combustion chamber. After a short period of "smoldering," sufficient energy is released by the GOX/ABS pre-burn to begin decomposition of the incoming peroxide. Once the chamber pressure builds up to exceed two atmospheres of oxygen partial pressure, the test experience of Ref. [2] has demonstrated that full combustion will occur. For the prototype peroxide motor tests of Ref. [6], ignition transients would typically vary between 400-800 milliseconds, but transients as long as 1.5 seconds were sometimes observed. Also note the very low energy input required for the system ignition, less than a mean of 4.5 watts for 2 seconds, or a total of 9 joules.

Note that the specific impulse plot (d) presents 4 graphs based upon the load-cell sensed thrust or thrust calculated from chamber pressure using theoretical values for the ratio of specific heats and molecular weight [40], and assuming a fully started nozzle. The cumulative calculation integrates the thrust over time and divides by the total consumed mass. The instantaneous calculation divides the instantaneous total massflow into the sensed or calculated thrust level.

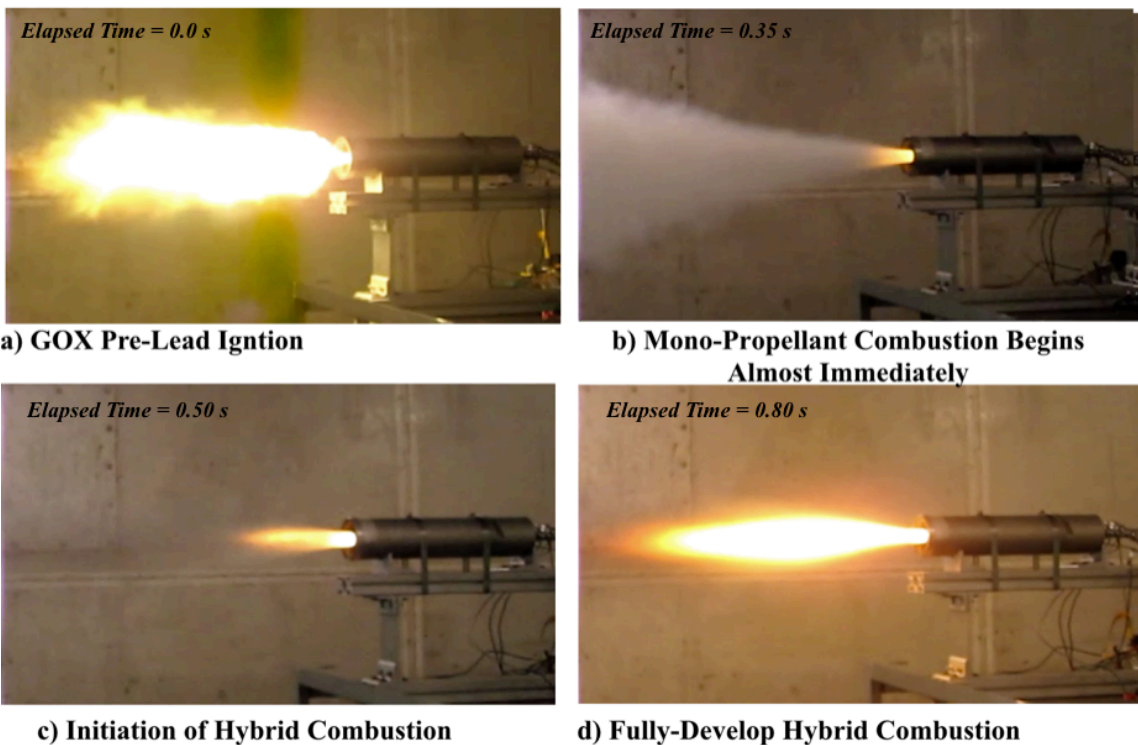
<sup>††</sup> Anon., "Dimension 1200es, Durability Meets Affordability," <http://www.stratasys.com/3d-printers/design-series/performance/dimension-1200es/>, [Retrieved 25 December 2013].

Note that the cumulative  $I_{sp}$  is lower than the *instantaneous value*, this result is primarily due to the initial shot of unburned oxidizer that depletes total propellant mass but provides little to the overall thrust level.



**Figure 4. An 8-Second Characterization Burn using ABS Fuel, and Large-Port Hollow Cone Injector**

Figure 5 shows a series of still images of the ignition sequence. Note (a) the initial disperse flame as the GOX pre-lead ignites but does not choke the nozzle exit. This event is followed by (b) the wet peroxide flow, and a (c) very rich flow stream where the peroxide flow is in the process of fully decomposing. Finally, in (d) full combustion is achieved and a well-developed plume results. The elapsed time on each image begins from the time when the main valve opening command is sent.



**Figure 5. Still Images from Ignition Development Test with 120° Swirl, Hollow-Cone Main Injector.**

This observed behavior is similar to behavior experienced by Rommingen and Husdal [17] during testing of their lab-scale 87.5%  $H_2O_2/HTPB$  motor. Reference [17] would experience ignition transients as long as two seconds where the propellant would initially "smolder" for as long as two seconds before building up sufficient chamber pressure and

heat to allow full combustion. Nammo would refer to these two events as "*monopropellant combustion mode*" and "*hybrid combustion mode*." Because of the startup transients, where unburned peroxide floods the combustion chamber during the startup transient, the integrated specific impulse values are consistently lower than the instantaneous values.

For this test series the mean "steady" specific impulse ( $I_{sp}$ ) values, calculated as the time-average of all values that are within 95% of the peak thrust value, was approximately 215 seconds. The mean "cumulative"  $I_{sp}$ , calculated as a running summation of the total impulse and the total consumed propellant mass, was approximately 201 seconds. Because of the startup transients, where unburned peroxide floods the combustion chamber during the startup transient, the integrated specific impulse values are consistently lower than the instantaneous values.

Tests were also performed by replacing the extruded ABS fuel sections with cast hydroxyl-terminated polybutadiene (HTPB) grain segments. Generally, the HTPB grains exhibited similar mean thrust land specific impulse levels, but were prone to erosive burning during burns exceeding 5 seconds duration. This erosive burning effect lead to significantly higher burn to burn thrust and total impulse variability.

#### F. Catalyst Augmentation of the Hybrid Motor Arc-Ignition System

Clearly, the observed ignition transients, some as long as 2 seconds, are less than idea. This paper will explore several novel methods for coupling the catalyst bed with the arc-ignition technique in order to reduce the observed hybrid ignition latency. Because the catalyst bed does not have to act in a stand-alone capacity, as it would with a mono-propellant system; multiple low-cost alternatives to the traditional noble-metal catalyst metals will be explored. The objective is to discover materials and support mechanisms that will allow the catalyst bed to act as a pre-warmer so that at least partially decomposed and heater oxidizer will be injected into the combustion chamber. The goal is to significantly startup transient times, and allow an overall increase in ignition reliability and combustion efficiency. No catalyst heater will be used for this design.

### IV. Background on Catalyst Materials for Hydrogen Peroxide Systems

At mass concentrations above 90% hydrogen peroxide is commonly referred to as high-test peroxide (HTP), and has been a well-known option in the monopropellant field for over half a century. [18] Peroxide is a chemical compound consisting of two hydrogen atoms and two oxygen atoms held together with two hydrogen-oxygen bonds and one oxygen-oxygen bond. In its aqueous form, peroxide is a clear liquid with a specific gravity 10-40% higher than water. Hydrogen peroxide is capable of undergoing an energetic decomposition reaction. Figure 6 shows the associated end-to-end reaction, neglecting intermediate products. In this reaction both oxidation and reduction occur at the same time. With a 100% solution this reaction is *produces up to 98.1 kJ* (3.33 MJ/kg) for every decomposed mole of peroxide. Typically, in an 85-90% aqueous solution,  $H_2O_2$  is reasonably stable requiring an activation energy of approximately  $75 \text{ kJ/mol}^{\ddagger\ddagger}$  in the absence of a catalyst. [19]

#### G. Traditional Noble Metal Catalyst Materials

In typical mono-propellant applications, the energy of activation  $E_a$ , can be significantly lowered using noble catalyst materials like silver, platinum, palladium, iridium, ruthenium. Catalyst beds made from silver or other noble metals can reduce the required activation from  $75 \text{ kJ/mol}$  to less than  $50 \text{ kJ/mol}$ . [18] Lowering the activation energy allows decomposition to begin with a significantly lower-energy input. Figure 7 illustrates this activation energy concept. A study in 1963 by Runckel, et al. [20] outlined several silver-based catalyst bed builds for use with 98% HTP. The authors achieved significant success with one particular configuration based on a piled series of silver-mesh screens. Following the publication of Runckel's report, activated-silver catbeds became the industry standard for high grade peroxide decomposition.

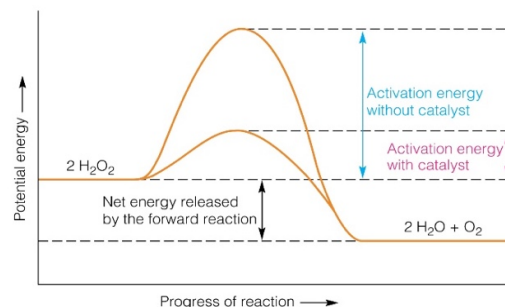
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<sup>‡‡</sup> Anon, "The Catalytic Decomposition of Hydrogen Peroxide", <http://chemed.chem.purdue.edu/demos/demosheets/19.6.html>.





**Figure 6: Hydrogen Peroxide Decomposing.**



**Figure 7: Hydrogen Peroxide Activation Energies.**

Unfortunately, there are several major drawbacks associated with using noble metals to build catalyst beds. These are;

1. *Cost,*
2. *Weight,*
3. *Durability,*
4. *Break in and pre-conditioning,*
5. *Lack of effectiveness and decomposition efficiency,*

The raw material required to build even a moderate massflow catalyst bed from noble metals can easily exceed one or more thousands of dollars. Because each catalyst bed is individually hand-crafted and assembled in a one-off manner; manufacturing labor costs add significantly to the system cost. Catalyst beds fabricated from noble metals are extremely heavy and contribute nothing to the propulsive mass of the system.

Noble metal catalyst beds also have significant operational durability issues. Because the catalytic activity of the catalyst depends upon the available surface area indirect contact with the solution, oxidation due heating generally reduces the effectiveness of the catalyst bed. Similarly, stabilizers like tin salts, phosphates, nitrates, added to preserve the peroxide solution have the effect of reducing the catalyst surface area, and may in effect "poison" a working catbed rendering it ineffective. When working with higher concentrations of peroxide, the decomposition temperature can reach or even exceed the melting temperature of the noble-metal catalyst material. The result is a long term deforming, sintering, and potentially plugging the flow path. All these lead to a decrease in the performance and eventual failure of the catalyst bed. This lack of durability further adds to the costs of using silver or platinum in the catbed design.

Catalyst beds consisting of silver or platinum screens require a "break-in" period or some form of up front activation treatments. This initial break in period is not well understood and is only solved by running peroxide solution through the catalyst bed until full decomposition is achieved. The required "break-in" period can be quite significant. [21] In order to reduce this this initial break-in period, catalyst materials are often subjected to a variety of activation processes. Two typical process involve soaking the base metal-screen materials in either nitric acid or samarium nitrate. Both of these activation methods are quite time consuming, and while nitric acid solutions are relatively benign; working with samarium nitrate poses major health concerns and must be handled with extreme caution.<sup>§§</sup> These recurring hands-on activities add to the cost of the catbed development.

Finally, there are simply better catalytic materials available than the traditional silver-screen designs. In an experimental characterization of a wide swath of catalytic materials has been carried out Rusek [22]. This author concluded that traditional silver-screen materials were, quite surprisingly, one of the least active catalyst materials. The least active catalysts were found to be samarium-promoted silver screens, i.e. the conventional peroxide decomposition catalysts.

Thus, in light of the aforementioned drawbacks with silver catalysts, and considering that the desired objective is to develop a simple, light -weight, inexpensive catbed design that will act to "assist" the primary arc-ignition system; there are clearly a variety of options that can be reconsidered. The following subsection will identify well-known and existing material alternatives, and consider how those alternatives can be best adapted to meet the stated project objectives.

## H. Development of Alternative Catalysts for Hydrogen Peroxide Decomposition

<sup>§§</sup> Anon, "Samarium Nitrate", Espi Metals, <http://www.espimetals.com/index.php/msds/703-samarium-nitrate>.

Numerous research papers investigating the effectiveness of peroxide catalyst materials have been published. A significant number of authors including the previously discussed authors Runckel [20] and Ponzo [21] have investigated the catalytic properties of silver and silver oxides. [23], [24], [25], [26], [27], [28] A similarly large group has investigated manganese dioxide ( $MnO_2$ ) supported on alumina or titanium dioxide. [29], [30], [31] [32], [33], [34], [35] Results are often conflicting. For example, Pirault-Roy et al. [35] performed several tests on the activity of silver, platinum, and manganese dioxide and found that silver had the highest reactivity with hydrogen peroxide, followed by manganese dioxide, and finally platinum. Bramanti et al. [36] also performed tests on these materials and showed that manganese (III) oxide ( $Mn_2O_3$ ) was the most reactive followed by silver and manganese dioxide. Metallic wires were also tested and showed that silver was the most reactive followed by platinum, palladium, and then gold. An interesting observation by Bramanti [36] was silver dissolving with time, thus limiting the available operational lifespan.

#### Previous Research with Noble Metal-Based Catalysts

As mentioned earlier Runckel [20] established the early prototype catalyst bed configuration using a pile of compressed silver mesh-screen. Of special interest for this work is Runckel's self-labeled "design #2." In order to activate the screens, Runckel soaked the screens for several hours in a 10% samarium nitrate solution. The deposited samarium tends to act as a surfactant allowing the flowing peroxide streams to adhere to the silver-screen meshes longer. The layout consisted of a stainless steel distribution plate, followed by nearly 50, 20-mesh silver screens. Anti-channel baffles were also included. This design was the basis for the first hot-fire catalyst bed studied by this campaign and the precise details will be presented later in this paper. This design was generally effective for very high concentrations of peroxide at 98%, but its performance dropped off as the peroxide concentration was reduced. This loss in efficiency has significant ramifications with regard to hybrid rocket applications and will be described later in this paper.

Jonker, et al [23] set up the silver screen catbed using an initial injector plate. Following an injector plate, they inserted four inert mesh screens made of 304 stainless steel to initially diffuse the hydrogen peroxide flow. They followed the inert section with sections of 15, 40-mesh screens of silver alternating with anti-channel baffles to prevent channeling flow from damaging the catalyst bed. Four additional inert screens of 304 stainless steel were added at the end before a support plate to give the catalyst bed added strength. To activate the silver, they were prepared in a 15% nitric acid solution and then heat treated the soaked screens at 900 K. The post treated screens were tested and found to exhibit a much higher activity than the pre-treatment screens.

Cervone, et al, [25] used a base catalyst of 80 mesh silver interchanged with bigger meshes of silver and nickel for added support. Su-LiM and Choong-Won [28] also explored silver screens as a catalyst. The silver screens were interspaced with other inert screens of stainless steel to add support and strength to the catalyst pack. A nitric acid solution was chosen to etch and activate the silver screens over the more complicated and hazardous samarium nitrate activation process. Several different configurations were built and tested. The catalyst beds were tested with 80%, 85%, and 90% hydrogen peroxide. The combustion efficiency  $\eta^*$  for each of the concentrations was above 90 % for each of the mass flow rates tested.

Other investigators including Ponzo [21] have tested alternative layouts for silver catalysts. Instead of the normal screen bed that is often used, a monolithic bed was developed. Consisting of stacked silver "platelets". These platelets were thin sheets of silver with varying sizes of holes on them. When stacked and bonded together, they offered high surface area contact with the peroxide. Ponzo reported that the bed delivers a lower pressure drop when compared to the traditional silver screen catalyst bed as well as improved lifespan. Using 90% concentrated peroxide and a massflow loading factor of  $40 \text{ g/s-cm}^2$  over a wide range of feed pressures, the catalyst beds demonstrated good performance up to 900 total seconds of use. The break-in period for this catalyst bed was reported as less than 5 seconds in full flow. Unfortunately, this type of catalyst bed configuration is patented and licensing the design is cost prohibitive for this project.

Due to its reported exceptional reactivity Platinum as a catalyst was explored by An, et al. [26], [27] An, et al, used a precursor solution of  $H_2PtCl_6$  to wet impregnate alumina pellets. The pellets were then dried and calcinated. Calcination is a process whereby a material is heated to a temperature slightly below the melting, causing loss of moisture, and deposition of any solids incorporated in the surface moisture. This process was carried out twice to obtain a high percentage coat of silver on the alumina pellets. Results showed that a decomposition efficiency of over 90% was achieved with the setup. A scaled-up thruster was also used with this type of catalyst bed. The authors did not discuss the effective lifetimes of the developed catalysts.

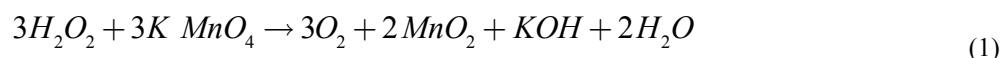
Previous Development on Alkali-Metal Based Catalyst Materials.

Several readily available and inexpensive minerals including potassium permanganate ( $KMnO_4$ ), sodium permanganate ( $NaMnO_4$ ), and manganese dioxide ( $MnO_2$ ) and are known to exhibit significant catalytic activity when immersed in peroxide solutions. Figure 8 shows samples of these minerals.



**Figure 8: Left to Right: Potassium Permanganate, Sodium Permanganate, and Manganese Dioxide.**

Potassium permanganate, a common compound used for various applications in the medical and water treatment industries, is a strong soluble oxidizer.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> When exposed to hydrogen peroxide, the reaction forms diatomic oxygen, manganese dioxide, potassium hydroxide, and water. The decomposition reaction is



Although potassium is widely available, low-cost, non-toxic, and presents no objective hazards; as noted by Eq. (1),  $KMnO_4$  is not a true catalyst, but participates in the decomposition reaction. Thus, with prolonged use the catalyst will be consumed by the reaction. Sodium permanganate exhibits similar properties to potassium permanganate, except it is more expensive to produce.

Because both materials are water soluble they cannot be directly embedded into a catalyst bed. Instead, that the permanganate can be dissolved in solution and a porous supporting material used to absorb the solution. By heat treatment and washing, a form of  $Mn_nO_2$  will be deposited onto the support. The resulting metal oxide is no longer water soluble, but is still highly catalytic in the presence of peroxide. While this process has been successfully carried out with sodium permanganate, [35] the authors found no available literature describing this process being conducted with potassium permanganate. Jo et al. [31], [34], used sodium permanganate as a precursor solution for building up a manganese dioxide catalyst.

Manganese dioxide<sup>†††</sup> is an inorganic solid that is mainly used in the production of dry-cell batteries. Manganese dioxide compound is not soluble in water, and should be more durable as a catbed material. designing possible catalyst bed solutions. Unlike  $KMnO_4$ ,  $MnO_2$  is a true catalyst of hydrogen peroxide and during the reaction the material is left unchanged, i.e. it is much less likely to be consumed and will exhibit a longer operational lifetime. Like potassium permanganate, manganese dioxide is easy to obtain, non-toxic, and low-cost. Its non-soluble characteristic helps the compound adhere to catalyst support better than a soluble one.

Jo et al. [31] did extensive work with manganese dioxide supported on alumina pellets. Manganese dioxide is a black-to-brown solid that occurs naturally as the inexpensive mineral pyrolusite. Manganese oxide has a valence state of +4 and is quite reactive. A mixture of manganese dioxide and lead oxide was also tested and compared to pure manganese dioxide. This  $MnO_2/PbO$  helped reduce the chugging instability that was observed at low chamber pressures when only using a  $MnO_2$  catalyst. An [30] and Jo [31] report these results. Sorge et al. [33] also used  $MnO_2$  but supported it on a titanium dioxide ( $TiO_2$ ) pellet. These authors showed that the catalyst bed exhibited a very high level of initial activity that drops over time until a steady state value was reached. Maia et al. [32] used a catalyst comprising of an extruded  $CoMnAl$  precipitate compound that showed no catalyst deactivation over time. The pellets showed no signs of degradation or fracturing and the bed itself suffered only minimal, but constant, pressure drops.

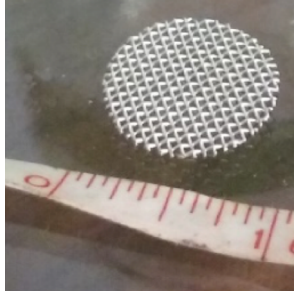
<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Anon, “Potassium Permanganate”, [Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potassium\\_permanganate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potassium_permanganate), [Retrieved 27 June 2018].

<sup>†††</sup> Anon, “Manganese; manganese dioxide”, [WebElements, https://www.webelements.com/compounds/manganese/manganese\\_dioxide.html](https://www.webelements.com/compounds/manganese/manganese_dioxide.html), [Retrieved 27 June 2018].

One significant disadvantage of  $MnO$  is its relatively low melting temperature of 535 °C. When  $MnO_2$  melts, the compound decomposes and loses its  $O_2$  molecule. As shown later by Figure 11, the decomposition temperature of hydrogen peroxide is typically well above this melting point. Thus, it is highly likely that the catalyst will decompose during use. The authors could find no published literature detailing how rapidly the catalytic effectiveness of  $MnO_2$  dissipates during use.

## V. Catalytic Test Material Selection and Preparation

Based on the previously-described literature search -- the catalytic materials silver and manganese dioxide -- were down-selected for further investigation. The silver catbed, constructed as specified by Runckel [20] for the #2 configuration, was selected as the reference configuration. This effectiveness of this more-conventional design will be compared against an equivalently-sized catbed constructed using manganese dioxide deposited onto a ceramic-pellet support material. Specific details for the catbed designs and their interface with the hybrid motor systems will be described later in the paper.



**Figure 9: Example of a Finished Silver Catalyst**

### I. Silver-Screen Catalyst

Because the Runckel [20] silver-screen catbed was selected as the control design for the augmentation catalyst bed, the chosen form for the silver catalytic material was a commercially-available 20-mesh silver screen cloth<sup>†††</sup> with a 0.016 in. (0.0381 cm) wire diameter. A series of 0.89 in. (2.26 cm) wire "rounds," were cut from this cloth. The diameters of the cut silver rounds, pictured by Figure 9, were calculated to allow the design oxidizer massflow for the hybrid motor, [6] approximately 50 g/sec with a cross-section massflux of approximately 12.5 g/cm<sup>2</sup>-s. This massflux value was recommended by Bengtsson and Bengtsson<sup>§§§</sup> based on extensive previous experience with monopropellant peroxide applications.

Sample test specimens were treated by two mechanisms prominently suggested by the available literature, 1) soaking in a 10% solution of Samarium Nitrate, followed by heat treatment, [20], [18], [37], and 2) soaking in a 30% nitric acid of various concentrations, followed by a post-soaking heat treatment. [37], [38]

#### Estimating the Contact Surface Index for the Silver Wire Mesh

An important parameter that determines the effectiveness of a catalyst form factor is the surface contact index, CSI. For non-spherical shapes the CSI may be calculated as the surface area of a sphere containing a volume equivalent to the volume of the test specimen,  $A_{s_{sph}}$ . For homogeneous powders, Brahmanti et al. [36] calculate the CSI by

$$CSI = \frac{m}{\rho} \cdot \frac{A_{s_{sph}}}{V_p} \quad (2)$$

In Eq. (2)  $m$  is the mass of material being used as the catalyst,  $\rho$  is the material density, and  $V_p$  is the volume of the catalyst material. For a wire strand with a nearly cylindrical cross-section, the CSI may be estimated as,

$$A_{s_{sph}} = \pi^{1/3} (6 \cdot V_{wire})^{2/3} = \pi \cdot \left( \frac{3}{2} L_{wire} \cdot D_{wire}^2 \right)^{2/3} \quad (3)$$

In Eq. (3)  $V_{wire}$  is the wire strand volume,  $D_{wire}$  is the wire strand diameter, and  $L_{wire}$  is the effective strand length. For a wire screen with mesh number  $M$ , the projected empty area  $W$  between wires is calculated as

<sup>†††</sup> Anon., "BWC, Wire Cloth, Wire mesh, and Woven Wire," <http://wirecloth.bwire.com/viewitems/woven-wire-cloth/silver-wire-cloth>, [Retrieved 20 June, 2018].

<sup>§§§</sup> Bengtsson E., and Bengtsson, G., "How do Hydrogen HTP Rockets Work?," HTP Propulsion, 19 March 2010. [Online]. Available: <http://www.HTPpropulsion.com/article/5>.

$$W = \frac{2.54 \text{ cm}}{M} - D_{\text{wire}} \quad (4)$$

The projected 2-D surface area of wires  $A_{\text{wire}}$  in a flat screen is calculated from the wire diameter and screen mesh number by

$$A_{\text{wire}} = \left( 2 - \frac{D_{\text{wire}}}{2.54 \text{ cm}} \cdot M \right) \cdot \left( \frac{D_{\text{wire}}}{2.54 \text{ cm}} \cdot M \right) A_{\text{screen}} \quad (5)$$

In Eq. (5),  $A_{\text{screen}}$  is the total screen element 2-D surface area. The wire screen area is related to the wire diameter and effective length by

$$A_{\text{wire}} = D_{\text{wire}} \cdot L_{\text{wire}} = \left( 2 - \frac{D_{\text{wire}}}{2.54 \text{ cm}} \cdot M \right) \cdot \left( \frac{D_{\text{wire}}}{2.54 \text{ cm}} \cdot M \right) A_{\text{screen}} \quad (6)$$

and the effective length is

$$L_{\text{wire}} = \left( 2 - \frac{D_{\text{wire}}}{2.54 \text{ cm}} \cdot M \right) \cdot \left( \frac{D_{\text{wire}}}{2.54 \text{ cm}} \cdot M \right) \frac{A_{\text{screen}}}{D_{\text{wire}}} \quad (7)$$

The *CSI* for the silver screen is calculated as spherical surface area in units of  $\text{mm}^2$ ,

$$CSI = \frac{\pi^{1/3} (6 \cdot V_{\text{wire}})^{2/3}}{10 \text{ mm/cm}} = \frac{\pi}{10 \text{ mm/cm}} \cdot \left( \frac{3}{2} L_{\text{wire}} \cdot D_{\text{wire}}^2 \right)^{2/3} = \frac{\pi}{10 \text{ mm/cm}} \cdot \left( \frac{3}{2} \left( \left( 2 - \frac{D_{\text{wire}}}{2.54 \text{ cm}} \cdot M \right) \cdot \left( \frac{D_{\text{wire}}}{2.54 \text{ cm}} \cdot M \right) A_{\text{screen}} \right) \cdot D_{\text{wire}} \right)^{2/3} \quad (8)$$

## J. Manganese Dioxide Catalyst

As recommended by Jo et al. [31] the manganese was prepared as a catalyst by depositing the material onto  $1/8$  in. diameter by  $1/4$  in. length  $\gamma$ -alumina pellets acting as support material.<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> The  $\gamma$ -alumina pellets were wet impregnated by soaking for 8 hours at ambient temperature in a 50% mass concentration podium permanganate solution. The pellets were left to soak at ambient temperature for 8 hours. After soaking, they were dried at 200 deg C. for 15 hours and then calcined at 800 deg. C. for 2 hours using a high-temperature tube furnace.<sup>††††</sup> Figure 10 shows the pellets before and after  $\text{MnO}_2$  deposition. Each treated pellet was counted and the collected set of pellets was weighed before and after in order to calculate the mean mass of catalyst deposited onto each pellet.



Figure 10: Plain  $\gamma$ -Alumina Pellets (Left) and Pellets with  $\text{MnO}_2$  Deposited.

<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> Alfa Aesar, 43832 Aluminum oxide, gamma-phase, catalyst support, high surface area, bimodal," <https://www.alfa.com/en/catalog/043832/>

<sup>††††</sup> Anon., Mini CVD Tube Furnace with 2 Channel Gas Mixer, Vacuum Pump, and Vacuum Gauge - OTF-1200X-S50-2F, [<http://www.mtixtl.com/MiniCVDTubeFurnace2ChannelGasVacuum-OTF-1200X-S50-2F.aspx>]

### Estimating the Contact Surface Index for the Silver Wire Mesh

For each coated pellet the CSI is calculated as

$$CSI = \frac{m}{\rho} \cdot \frac{A_{s_{sph}}}{V_p} \approx \pi^{1/3} (6 \cdot V_p)^{2/3} = \pi^{1/3} (6 \cdot \pi \cdot D_{pellet}^2 \cdot L_{pellet})^{2/3} \quad (9)$$

In Eq. (9)  $D_{pellet}$  is the approximate diameter of each coated pellet, and  $L_{pellet}$  is the effective length. The effective lengths and diameters also includes twice the thickness of  $MnO_2$  deposited onto the alumina surface,

$$D_{pellet} = D_{alumina} + 2 \cdot \sqrt[3]{\left(\frac{m}{\rho}\right)_{MnO_2}}$$

$$L_{pellet} = L_{alumina} + 2 \cdot \sqrt[3]{\left(\frac{m}{\rho}\right)_{MnO_2}} \quad (10)$$

### K. Distillation of High Purity, High Concentration Hydrogen Peroxide

One of the more significant challenges associated with this research campaign was procuring high-purity peroxide solutions at a concentration level that was useful for our propulsion applications, between 85 and 90%. Nearly all commercially available peroxide at high concentration levels contains some form of stabilization in order to make the solutions long-term storable. Common stabilizers include chelants, tin and sodium pyrophosphate, and sequestrants, colloidal silicate.<sup>††††</sup> These additives are known to effectively poison catalytic materials, especially silver; and the authors believed that this effect would bias the test comparisons.

As an added benefit, using this approach means that large quantities of high-grade peroxide need not be stored on site. This f advantage lead to considerable infrastructure and operational cost savings for this test campaign. Thus, as an Operating Principle, the project decided it would only keep on hand the amount of high concentration peroxide solution necessary to complete a single day's-worth of testing, with maximum allowable storage time of two days. Only 50% or lower concentrations of  $H_2O_2$  were stored for more than two days.

To solve the described problem, the authors have developed a condensation procedure to manufacture small



**Figure 11: Rotary Evaporator System Used to Condense High Concentration Peroxide from Low-grade Solution.**

amounts of high purity, high concentration. The method was adapted from an earlier procedure established Rarata and Surmacz.<sup>37</sup> In this approach a low-grade peroxide solution is condensed to high concentration using a custom built distillation apparatus. Figure 11 shows the evaporator arrangement with the laboratory-quality Wilmad WG-EV311 rotary evaporator<sup>§§§§</sup> installed under a fume hood to collect any extraneous peroxide vapor. In this procedure a sample flask containing the low concentration peroxide solution rotates in the temperature controlled bath.

A vacuum pump attaches to top of condensing chamber to lower the evaporation point of the solution. An isolated coiled tube runs through condensing chamber. Ice water is pumped through the coils to condense the

<sup>††††</sup> Anon., "What are the stabilizers of Hydrogen Peroxide," Quora, <https://www.quora.com/What-are-the-stabilizers-of-hydrogen-peroxide>.

<sup>§§§§</sup> Anon., "WG-EV311 Rotary Evaporator, Vertical Condenser (110/115V Only), Wilmad-Labglass, SP Scienceware, <https://www.wilmad-labglass.com/ProductList.aspx?t=26696>.

evaporated fluid. Low peroxide concentration condensate collects in flask at bottom of condensing chamber. The remaining material in the distillation flask grows increasingly more concentrated with time.

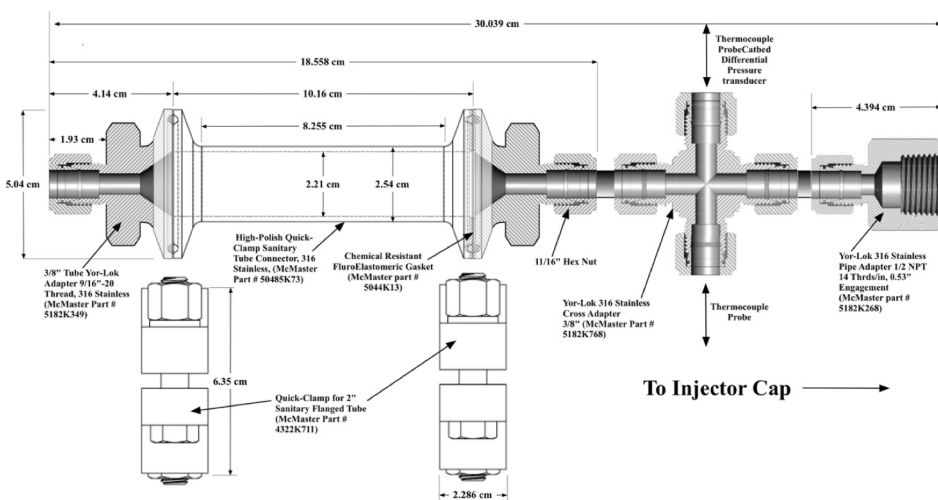
The vacuum level, bath temperature, and rotation speed are adjustable. The current process uses a regulated 55 °C heater bath and a soft vacuum of approximately 0.1 atmospheres. The low 55 °C bath temperature minimizes the peroxide loss to the distillate and ensures that thermal decomposition will not occur during distillation. A closed-cycle greaseless pump is used to draw the vacuum. With this setup the team was able to reduce 50% grade peroxide to 75-85% concentration, producing as much as 400 ml of concentrated solution within 4-5 hours. The process loses approximately 50% of the original volume, and is thus about 80% efficient in terms of peroxide retention. In this one-step process the vacuum and temperature setting are such that the water in solution is vaporized, but the peroxide and stabilizers remains behind.

Two readily-available sources of low-grade peroxide were evaluated for this project. Originally, all condensation operations were performed using 50% concentration product available from Sigma-Aldrich.<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup> It was discovered that this product contains a proprietary stabilizer formula with tin compounds and chelating agents. A second and desirable product was supplied by ThermoFisher Scientific<sup>++++</sup> in a 30% concentration. At this concentration level, there is no need for added stabilizers, and the product is certified by the American Chemical Society as reagent grade purity.

Using the Sigma-Aldrich 50% product as the starting solution, concentrating to greater than 85% was problematic due to the precipitation of stabilizers and solution "clouding". The clouding results from the stabilizers being concentrated in the condensed solution. Using the Sigma-Aldrich 50% product it is likely that a double distillation process will be required to achieve a 90% or greater concentration. In contrast the ThermoFisher 30% product did not use stabilizers and the resulting condensates remained clear regardless of the final concentration. Interestingly, once the laboratory switched to the 30% ThermoFisher Scientific product, then the time required to reduce to a 90% concentration dropped considerably, to approximately three hours. Also, the resulting end-product did not exhibit the visual cloudiness observed for the solution derived from derived from the 50% Sigma-Aldrich product. Apparently, the stabilizers in the 50% solution also served to make it considerably more difficult to condense to high concentration

## VI. Augmentation Catalyst Bed Design and Installation

The augmentation catalyst bed was not a "clean sheet design," but instead must be adapted to fit the existing test article described earlier in Section III. In order to adapt the system for  $H_2O_2$  as the oxidizer, a catalyst holder made



**Figure 12. Catalyst Bed Holder Installed Upstream of the Hybrid Motor Combustion Chamber Injection Section.**

from an industrial-grade sanitary fitting was installed into the peroxide feed line upstream of the motor. The catalytic materials are housed within the sanitary fitting. Decomposition output products are funneled into the motor combustion chamber through the normal oxidizer flow path. An external band heater was used to pre-heat the catalyst bed before peroxide flow was initiated.

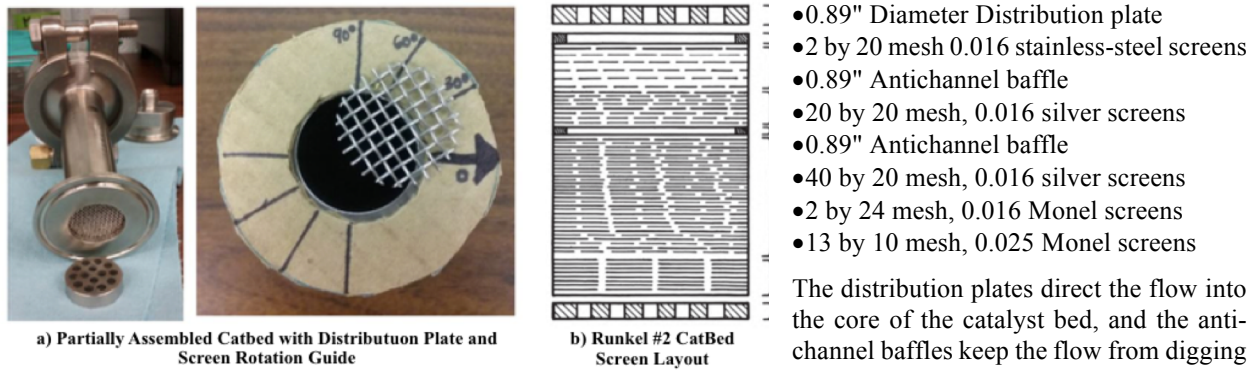
\*\*\*\*\* Sigma-Aldrich, Safety Data Sheet, Hydrogen Peroxide Solution, Product No. 516813, 50 wt. % in  $H_2O$ , Stabilized, Version 5.7, 09/29/2017. [Retrieved 9 June 2017].

++++ ThermoFisher Scientific, Safety Data Sheet, Hydrogen Peroxide, 30%, Cat. No. H325-4 Rev. 6, May 24, 2007. [Retrieved 9 June 2017].

Figure 12 shows the overall systems concept, where the peroxide is fed into the thruster chamber, and the resulting decomposition products are blended with gaseous oxygen just before injection into the thrust chamber. Figure 3 shows the motor cap with the peroxide and GOX ports depicted. The interior of the catbed holder is sufficiently long to allow for a catalyst of up to 8.25 cm (3.25 in.) long, and has an internal diameter of 2.21 cm (0.89 in.). The maximum available L/D of the catbed is correspondingly 3.735. The entire assembled catbed fixture weighs approximately 620 grams.

**L. "Runckel" #2 Silver-Screen Catalyst Bed**

As mentioned Runckel #2 silver screen catbed design, [20] was used as the baseline/control for this test series. Figure 13 depicts this catbed layout. The design consists of the following elements order,



**Figure 13: Runckel #2 Catbed Design Details.**

screens are added in order to increase the strength of the stack. As described in the previous section, the 0.89 in. screen diameter was selected to allow the original design massflow of 50 g/s with a massflux of approximately 12.5 g/cm<sup>2</sup>-s. All of the screens were packed into the housing and each screen was rotated 30 degrees from the previous screen before being inserted. The pack was then compressed to 2200 psi.

**M. MnO<sub>2</sub> Catalyst Bed**



**Figure 14: Layout of Pellet Bed.**

The pellet bed design follows recommendations offered by Jo[31] and Salahuddin.[39] The same 0.89” inner diameter sanitary fitting housing was used for the pellet-based catbed. Figure 14 shows the layout. The configuration consists of the same distribution plates used to direct the flow into the bed. After the distribution plates, two monel screens were used to partially atomize the incoming flow and contain the pellets. Then flow then passes through the core of the pellet bed. Two more Monel screens were added and finally the exit support plate. Approximately 20 grams of prepared catalyst pellets could fit without compression into the catbed bed housing.

**N. Catbed Design Efficiency Considerations**

Reduced efficiency of the catbed has a critical effect on lowering the peroxide decomposition temperature. Thus, choosing an appropriate catbed geometry is critical in order to avoid a "wet start" that may affect ignitability of the system. The general reaction for catalytic decomposition of a peroxide solution with a given mass concentration *f* and a given decomposition efficiency  $\eta$  is,

$$H_2O_2 + \left[ \left( \frac{1-f}{\eta \cdot f} \right) \cdot \left( \frac{M_{w_{H_2O_2}}}{M_{w_{H_2O}}} \right) \right] H_2O = \frac{1}{\eta} \left[ 1 + \left( \frac{1-f}{f} \right) \left( \frac{M_{w_{H_2O_2}}}{M_{w_{H_2O}}} \right) H_2O + \frac{1}{2} O_2 \right] + \left( \frac{\eta-1}{\eta} \right) \cdot H_2O_2 \tag{11}$$



In Eq. (11)  $\eta$  is the decomposition efficiency, and the  $M_w$ 's are the approximate molecular weights of pure peroxide ( $34 \text{ kg/kg-mol}$ ), and water ( $18 \text{ kg/kg-mol}$ ). Inspection shows that when a catalyst bed does not allow complete decomposition of the incoming HTP, then the "effective" mass ratio of the propellant becomes

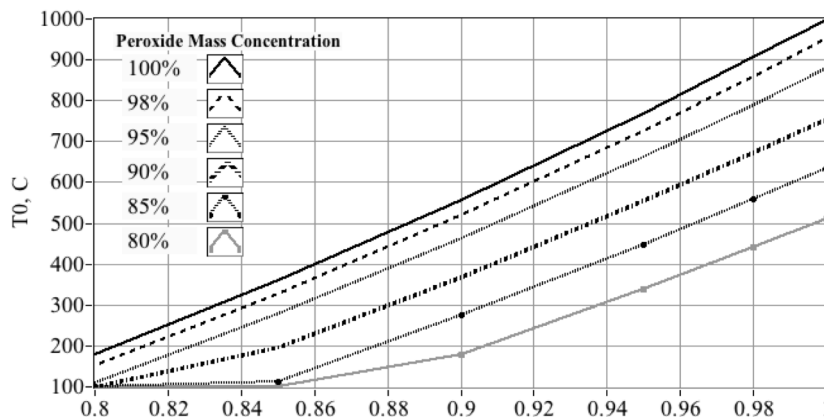
$$\frac{M_{H_2O_2}}{M_{H_2O_2} + M_{H_2O}} = \frac{1}{1 + \frac{M_{H_2O}}{M_{H_2O_2}}} = \frac{1}{1 + \left(\frac{M_{w_{H_2O}}}{M_{w_{H_2O_2}}}\right) \left(\frac{m_{H_2O}}{m_{H_2O_2}}\right)} = \frac{\eta \cdot f}{1 - (\eta - 1) \cdot f} \tag{12}$$

and in terms of the released energy, the effective propellant concentration is

$$\eta \cdot \frac{M_{H_2O_2}}{M_{H_2O_2} + M_{H_2O}} = \frac{\eta}{1 + \frac{M_{H_2O}}{M_{H_2O_2}}} = \frac{\eta^2 \cdot f}{1 - (\eta - 1) \cdot f} \tag{13}$$

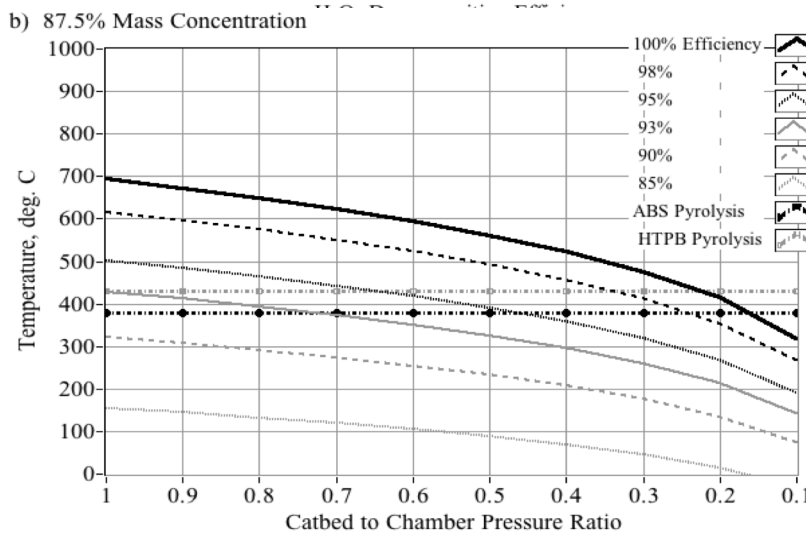
Effect of Decomposition Efficiency on Catbed Outlet Temperatures.

Figure 15 plots the predicted decomposition temperatures as a function of decomposition efficiency and HTP concentration. For example, reading Figure 15, a 90% peroxide solution with  $\eta = 80\%$  decomposition efficiency gives an effective mass fraction of 70.2%. Thus the corresponding exhaust temperature will be reduced accordingly. For



90% solution decomposed at 80% efficiency the catbed exit temperature will drop from approximately  $740 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  to less than  $300 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ . This inefficiency will have critical effects with regard to hybrid rocket operation, and will be discussed in more detail later in the warm-flow test discussions.

Effect of Flow Expansion on Plume Temperatures Entering Hybrid Combustion Chamber



During the initial hybrid rocket ignition sequence the combustor chamber pressure lies at or near the ambient operating conditions. When the partially-decomposed, relatively high-pressure peroxide stream leaves the catbed and enters the initially low-pressure combustion chamber; the expansion will cause significant adiabatic cooling to occur. The data plotted on Figure 16 reinforce this assertion. Here the plume temperatures entering the combustion chamber are calculated using the NASA equilibrium Chemistry Program CEA, [40] at various  $P_c/P_{exit}$  ratios. Plotted are the predicted initial combustion chamber temperatures for 87.5% peroxide decomposition at {100%,

**Figure 16: Effect of Expansion Ratio and Combustion Efficiency on Pre-Combustion Chamber Temperatures.**

98% 95%, 93%, and 85%} decomposition efficiencies. Also plotted are typical pyrolysis temperatures for the hybrid previously-described rocket fuels ABS (~380 °C) [41] and HTPB (~435 °C).[42]

Note, that even at 100% decomposition efficiency, the chamber gas temperature does not exceed the pyrolysis temperature of HTPB unless  $P_c/P_{exit}$  exceeds 0.24. For ABS which pyrolyzes at a lower temperature, that value drops 0.18. As an example, assuming a catbed exit pressure of 250 psia, then under steady flow conditions and perfect decomposition efficiency, fuel pyrolysis will not begin until the chamber pressure reaches at least 60 psia for HTB and 45 psia for ABS. At 90% decomposition efficiency, these values rise to 95 psia and 72 psia, respectively.

Below these chamber pressure ratios, the cooled gaseous by products enter the chamber at temperatures substantially below the pyrolysis temperatures of the fuel. Without fuel pyrolysis, then complete combustion will not occur. If pressure drop  $P_c/P_{exit}$  is sufficiently large, then the entering peroxide plume will supercool; forcing even fully vaporized water to condense into liquid form. Such "soaked" fuel grain is extremely difficult to ignite.

**VII. Catalytic Activity Tests**

Although both Rusek (1996) [22], and Brahmanti et al. [36] performed extensive studies to assess the relative catalycity of both silver and manganese dioxide, both of these studies used the materials in powdered form and not in the form that will be used to build the ignition augmentation catbeds. For this reason, it was decided to perform a closely-controlled set of baseline reactivity tests using both materials before integrating them into the ignition augmentation catbed. This section presents the results of these assessment test. The baseline data will be used later to interpret the results of the hybrid motor hot fire tests.

**O. Evaluation Silver Catalyst Material Activation Treatments**

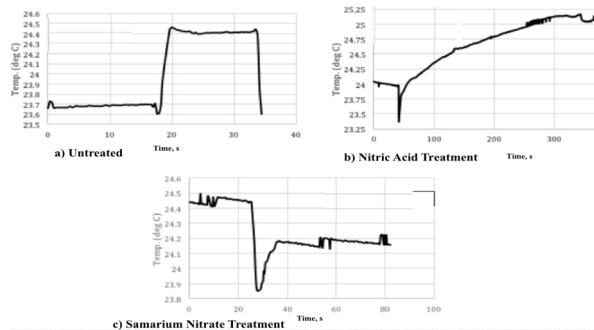
A series of initial tests was performed on the silver screen meshes in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the previously described samarium nitrate and nitric acid treatments. The silver screens received either no treatment, nitric acid treatment, or samarium nitrate treatments as described Table 1. Following the solution soak, the screens were heated to approximately 250 °C for 45 minutes in a small electric resistance oven.



**Figure 17: Test Fixture for Measuring Temperature Rise Catalyst Stack.**

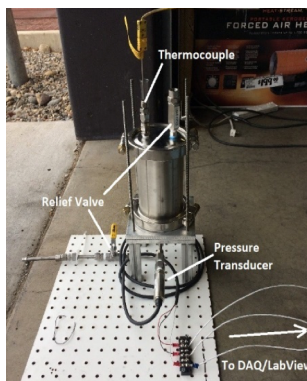
**Table 1: Matrix of Activation Variables.**

Activation Treatment Option	None	30% Nitric Bath	10% Acid Samarium Nitrate Bath
Time in Bath (s)	--	60	60
Rinsed with Distilled Water	No	Yes	Yes
Time in Oven (min)	--	45	45
Number of tests	2	2	2



**Figure 18. Comparison of Temperature Rises Associated with Silver Catalyst Screen Pre-Treatments.**

For these qualitative pre-treatment evaluation tests, the previously-described catalyst Runckel #2 pack were assembled with the test silver screens to be evaluated and a thermocouple was attached to the exit of the catalyst pack. The entire assembly was placed in a glass beaker. Figure 17 shows this test configuration. Using an eyedropper 10 ml of 50% peroxide was flowed through the through the system. One activated samples with each treatment as well as two untreated control samples were tested. Figure 18 shows the test results. The two untreated control samples (a) produced nearly identical results and rapidly raised the temperature by approximately  $0.9^\circ$ , before saturating and dropping off. The nitric acid treated samples (b) produced a gradual change with temperatures varying between approximately  $1.9$  and  $2.4^\circ\text{C}$ . Unlike, the untreated samples, this change was more of a smoldering nature with a gradual increase over a nearly 6-minute time frame. Neither of the two samarium nitrate treated samples (c) exhibited any discernable temperature rise. In fact, the first sample tested exhibited a slight temperature loss, likely due to evaporative cooling. The samarium nitrate test results supports the earlier results presented by Rusek [43]. Samarium nitrate is not an effective activation treatment for catalysis when applied to all but very high concentrations of peroxide,  $\geq 95\%$ .



**Figure 19: Pressure Vessel Test Setup to Measure Pellet Catalyst Reactivity.**

#### P. Comparison of Nitric Acid Activated Silver Screen with $\text{MnO}_2$ Treated $\alpha$ -alumina Pellets.

Based on the results of the previous section, the nitric acid treated silver screen was down-selected as the control catalyst for the hot fire tests. This catalytic material was to be compared to  $\text{MnO}_2$  as the low-cost alternative catalyst. Before integrating onto the hybrid motor for hot-fire testing, a series of quantitative tests were performed to compare the activity of the acid-treated silver screen against the  $\text{MnO}_2$  impregnated  $\alpha$ -alumina pellets for three low concentrations of peroxide, 20%, 30%, and 50%. Table 2 compares the materials, geometries, and peroxide mass concentrations evaluated by these test. Eqs. (8) and (9) were used to calculate the approximate CSI values. Although an effort was made to match the Contact Surface Indices (CSI) of the screens and pellets as closely as possible, in the end the silver screen catalyst presented approximately 5.7% higher CSI values ( $648.5 \text{ mm}^2$ ) than did the impregnated pellets ( $613.5 \text{ mm}^2$ ).

Figure 19 shows this test apparatus. Here the reaction chamber consisted of a stainless steel quick-clamp tube mounted on a support stand. Sealed feedthroughs allowed the  $\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$  solution temperature measurement using a thermocouple probe. An absolute pressure transducer was fit onto the top of the stainless-steel reaction tank to sense the pressure rise due to the peroxide solution decomposition. A small mesh basket was constructed from non-reactive Monel screens. The basket holding the catalytic materials was secured to the top of the tank via a manual lever. When the lever was opened, the basket falls into the hydrogen peroxide bath and immediately initiates decomposition. The pressure and temperature data were logged and used to calculate the mass concentration and molarity of the solution remaining reaction tank as the peroxide decomposed over time. The sensed rates of reaction and temperature were used to estimate the energy of activation for the catalyzed decomposition.

**Table 2: Catalytic Activity Test Matrix.**

Test #	Material	Screen/Pellet Mass Ea. (g)	# of Screens /Pellets	Catalytic Mass, total (g)	CSI, total ( $\text{mm}^2$ )	$\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ Solution Mass (g)	$\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$ Solution %
Ag 1A	Silver Screen	0.720	8	0.720	647.9	200	20.1%
Ag 1B	Silver Screen	0.724	8	0.724	650.3	206	19.8%
Ag 1C	Silver Screen	0.718	8	0.718	646.7	204	19.9%
Ag 2A	Silver Screen	0.723	8	0.723	649.7	225	29.9%
Ag 2B	Silver Screen	0.725	8	0.725	650.9	226	30.0%

Ag 2C	Silver Screen	0.709	8	0.709	641.3	230	30.1%
Ag 3A	Silver Screen	0.729	8	0.729	653.3	265	44.5%
Ag 3B	Silver Screen	0.721	8	0.721	648.5	268	44.3%
Ag 3C	Silver Screen	0.720	8	0.720	647.9	272	43.8%
<b>Mean Data</b>		<b>0.721</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0.721</b>	<b>648.5</b>	<b>232.9</b>	<b>31.3%</b>
Mn 1A	MnO <sub>2</sub> on α-Alumina	0.27	8	0.0594	625.8	86	20.0%
Mn 1B	MnO <sub>2</sub> on α-Alumina	0.254	8	0.0528	600.8	151	20.1%
Mn 2A	MnO <sub>2</sub> on α-Alumina	0.260	8	0.0572	610.2	207	19.8%
Mn 2B	MnO <sub>2</sub> on α-Alumina	0.264	8	0.0528	616.4	207	19.3%
Mn 3A	MnO <sub>2</sub> on α-Alumina	0.259	8	0.0551	608.6	204	30.0%
Mn 3B	MnO <sub>2</sub> on α-Alumina	0.254	8	0.0558	600.8	211	30.0%
Mn 4A	MnO <sub>2</sub> on α-Alumina	0.24	8	0.0528	607.1	245	46.0%
Mn 4B	MnO <sub>2</sub> on α-Alumina	0.24	8	0.0578	638.1	275	43.3%
<b>Mean Data</b>		<b>0.255</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0.0554</b>	<b>613.5</b>	<b>198.3</b>	<b>28.6%</b>

#### Analysis Methods for Reactivity Tests

This analysis assumes that the peroxide solution remains below the boiling point of water and that pressure rise is entirely due to the oxygen liberated by the decomposition reaction. The mass of oxygen released is calculated by,

$$\delta M_{O_2} = \left( \frac{\delta p_{O_2}}{R_g \cdot T} \right) \cdot V_c \quad (13)$$

In Eq. (13)  $\delta p_{O_2}$  is the pressure change due to oxygen released from peroxide decomposition,  $R_g$  is the gas constant for oxygen,  $T_{H_2O_2}$  is the temperature of the peroxide solution, and ullage volume of the reaction chamber. For every mole of oxygen generated, two moles of peroxide are decomposed, and two moles of water are released into solution. Assuming an initial solution mass  $m_o$ , and an initial peroxide mass concentration  $f_o$ , the solution molality as a function of time is

$$\mathbb{M}(t) = \frac{n_{H_2O_2}(t)}{m_{H_2O}(t)} = n_{H_2O_2}(0) - 2 \frac{\left( \frac{\delta p_{O_2}}{R_g \cdot T} \right) \cdot V_c}{M_{w_{O_2}}} \left/ \left[ \left( \frac{100 - f_o}{100} \right) m_0 + \left( \frac{\delta p_{O_2}}{R_g \cdot T} \right) \cdot V_c \cdot \frac{M_{w_{H_2O}}}{M_{w_{O_2}}} \right] \right. \quad (14)$$

The corresponding mass concentration is

$$\eta(t) = \frac{m_{H_2O_2}(t)}{m_{H_2O}(t) + m_{H_2O_2}(t)} = \frac{\mathbb{M}(t) \cdot M_{w_{H_2O_2}}}{1000 + \mathbb{M}(t) \cdot M_{w_{H_2O_2}}} \quad (15)$$

and finally the solution molality is

$$M = \frac{\rho_{soln}}{\left(\frac{1}{M} + \frac{M_{w_{H_2O_2}}}{1000}\right)} = \frac{M \cdot \rho_{soln}}{\left(1 + \frac{M \cdot M_{w_{H_2O_2}}}{1000}\right)} \quad (16)$$

In Eq. (16)  $\rho_{soln}$  is the current instantaneous density of the peroxide solution, and is function of the solution concentration.

The peroxide decomposition process here is modeled as a simple Arrhenius-type of first order reaction<sup>44</sup>

$$\frac{\partial M(t)}{\partial t} = -k \cdot M(t) \quad (17)$$

where  $k$  is the reaction rate constant. The reaction rate is related to the energy of activation  $\Delta E_a$  by

$$k = A \cdot e^{-\frac{\Delta E_a}{R_u \cdot T}} \quad (18)$$

In Eq. (18)  $R_u$  is the universal gas constant, and  $T$  is the mean reaction temperature, expressed in Kelvins. Plotting the rates of reaction against the reaction temperature and curve fitting with a line of the form

$$\ln(k) = Y_0 - S \cdot \frac{1}{T} \quad (19)$$

then, the scale factor and activation energy are calculated by

$$\begin{aligned} A &= e^{Y_0} \\ \Delta E_a &= -S \cdot R_u \end{aligned} \quad (20)$$

### Summary of Activity Test Results

Figure 20 presents an example decomposition time history taken from test *Mn 3A*. Plotted are the reaction chamber pressure, the peroxide solution temperature, the released mass of O<sub>2</sub> (from decomposition), and the mass concentration of the remaining solution. Because the solution temperature is well below the boiling point of water, it is assumed that the water liberated by the reaction is entirely in liquid form, and only the released oxygen gas contributes to the sensed pressure. Over a period of 150 seconds after the MnO<sub>2</sub> is introduced to the 30% solution, the pressure rises by approximately 56 kPa, the solution temperature rises by approximately 3.5 °C, and the solution concentration drops to less than 29.4% concentration. Based on Eq. (16), Figure 20 also plots the molarity (e) decay and Molarity (f) rate of decay as a function of time.

Table 3 shows the results where the mean reaction temperature, mean solution molarity, mean molarity slope and reaction rates, from Eq. (17), are tabulated for each test. For this table, as shown by Figure 20 the molarity time history has been fit with a linear curve in order to estimate the time rate of decay. The process is clearly non-linear, higher order than a simple Arrhenius process; however, Eq. (18) can still be used to compare the relative energies of activation for the two catalytic processes, peroxide decomposition catalyzed by silver screen and MnO<sub>2</sub>.

**Table 3. Tabulated Results from Catalytic Activity Tests.**

Test No.	T(avg) K	M(avg) (mol/l)	M(slope) (mol/s)	k (rate) (1/s)
<b>Silver Screen Catalyst</b>				
Ag 1A	305.2	6.2951	-0.000785	0.000125
Ag 1B	313.2	6.2702	-0.002172	0.000346
Ag 1C	318.3	6.2540	-0.002519	0.000403
Ag 2A	304.1	9.7923	-0.001221	0.000125
Ag 2B	317.5	9.71934	-0.002901	0.000299

Ag 2C	327.1	9.6608	-0.005337	0.000552
Ag 3A	302.6	15.5336	-0.001950	0.0001256
Ag 3B	331.2	15.2366	-0.0095233	0.000625
Ag 3C	341.2	15.1300	-0.012523	0.000828

#### MnO<sub>2</sub> Impregnated $\alpha$ -Alumina Pellet Catalyst

Mn 1A	322.2	8.0738	-0.00480	0.000662
Mn 1B	342.8	9.3149	-0.00802	0.001122
Mn 2A	298.6	6.0600	-0.00098	0.000165
Mn 2B	308.3	6.0405	-0.00127	0.000215
Mn 3A	296.8	9.8133	-0.00172	0.000178
Mn 3B	305.1	9.7597	-0.00232	0.000240
Mn 4A	299.7	15.8871	-0.00530	0.000184
Mn 4B	311.7	15.0221	-0.00784	0.000362

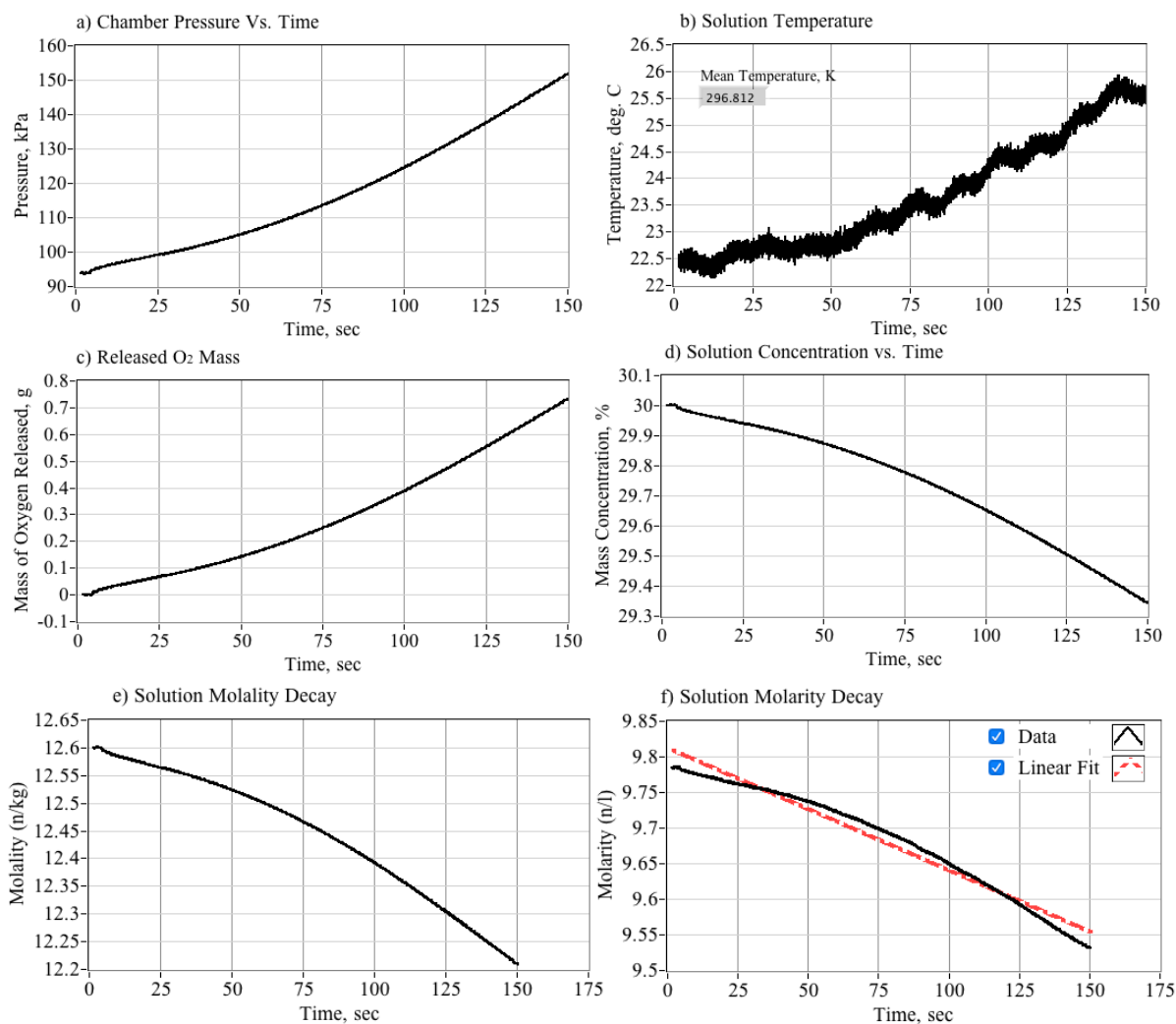
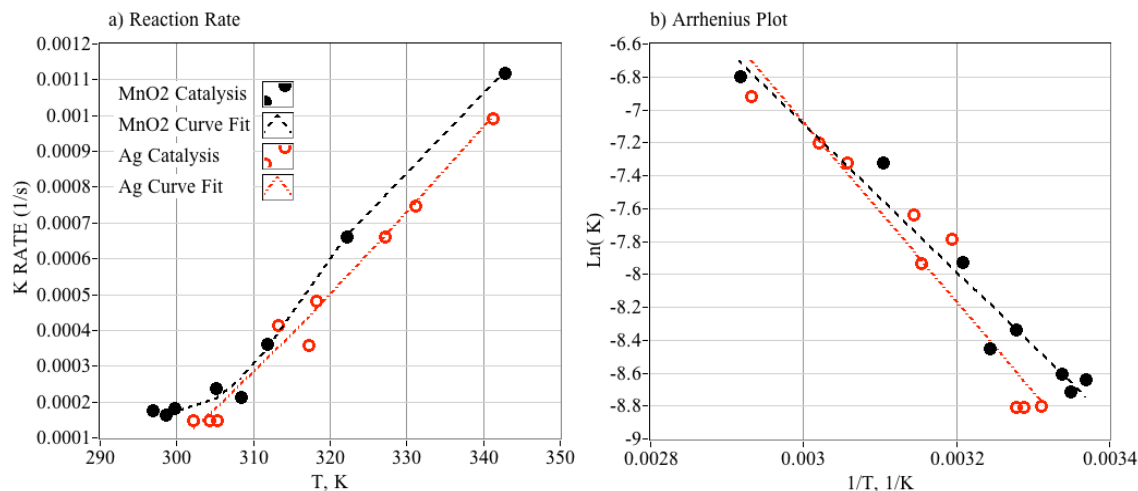


Figure 20. Decomposition Time History after MnO<sub>2</sub> Catalyst Pellets Introduced to 30% Peroxide Solution.

Figure 21(a) plots the derived-reaction rates against the mean reaction temperature; while, Figure 21 (b) shows the Arrhenius plot where the natural log of the reaction rate is plotted against  $1/T$ , with  $T$  expressed in Kelvin units. Note that even though the manganese dioxide coated pellets had a slightly lower CSI compared to the silver screens, the  $MnO_2$  generally shows a higher decomposition rate as a function of temperature. Table 4 compares the resulting Arrhenius reactivity parameters calculated from these plots using Eqs. (19) and (20). Based on this data the  $MnO_2$  pellets appear to significantly increase, by more than 20%, the decomposition activation energy when compared to the nitric acid treated silver screens.



**Figure 21. Comparison of  $H_2O_2$  Reactivity data for Ag and  $MnO_2$  Catalysts.**

**Table 4: Summary of Arrhenius Reactivity Parameters for Ag and  $MnO_2$ .**

$z$	$Y_0$	Slope	$A$ moles/s	$\Delta E_a$ kJ/mol-K	$\Delta E_a$ kJ/g-K
Silver Screen Ag	9.374	-5457.79	11782.8	45.38	1.335
$MnO_2$ Impregnated $\alpha$ Alumina	6.425	-4501.50	616.97	37.03	1.089

As check on the veracity of the data plotted by Fig. (21), the data are overlaid upon analytical results derived by Bramanti, et al [36]. Here the data plotted on Figs. 7 and 8 of Ref. [36] have been reorganized to plot the logarithm of the reaction rate against the inverse of the reaction temperature. Figure 22 overlays the results from Figure 21(b) on this re-organized data for (a) silver and (b) manganese dioxide. Generally, the comparisons are reasonable with the data of Fig. (21) lining up well with the calculations based on CST. For  $MnO_2$ , the reaction rates present nearly parallel curves indicating the assumed Arrhenius form for the reaction rate-temperature relation is an appropriate assumption. However, the theoretical predictions of Ref. [36] show slope-changes as a function of CSI for silver; and this behavior is indicative of a higher-order reaction. The main points to take away from Fig. 22 are 1) the reaction rates of Fig. 21 are at-least reasonably supported by analytical predictions, and 2)  $MnO_2$  appears to offer a moderately larger reduction in energy of activation, when compared to the nitric-acid treated silver screens.

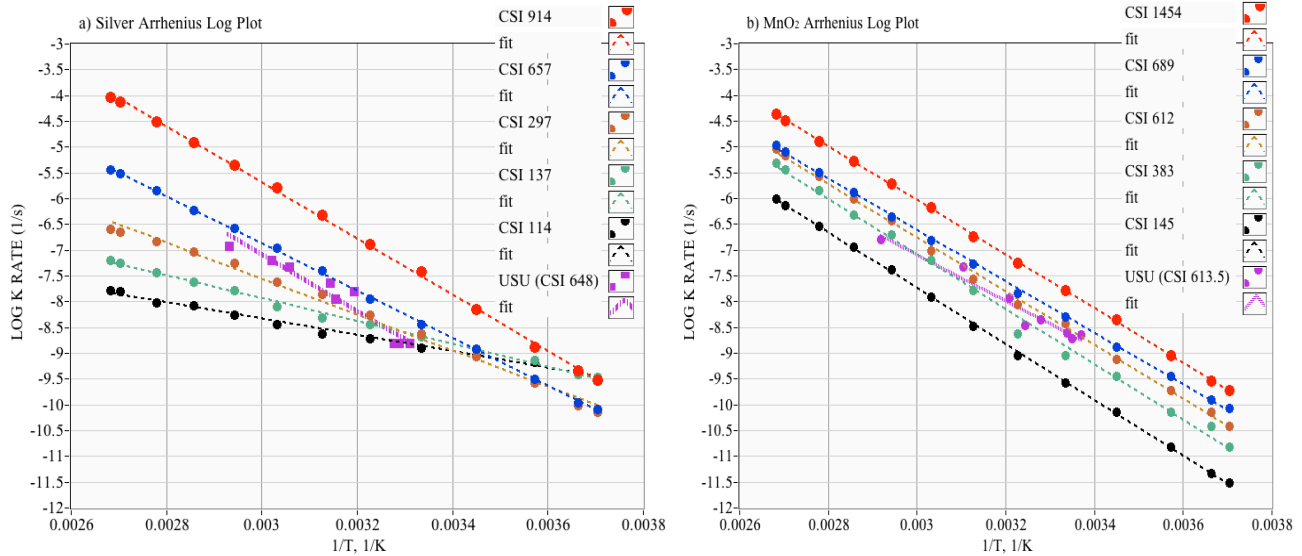


Figure 22. Comparing USU-Derived Reaction-Rate Test Results of Against Theoretic Calculations of Ref. [36].

### VIII. Hot Fire Test Campaign

As described previously, a series of hot firings were performed in order to evaluate the performance of the catalyst-augmented ignition system. The primary objective of this test series was to demonstrate that catalytic augmentation can be used to significantly reduce the 'wet-flow' ignition latency depicted by Figs. 4 and 5. Prior to testing each of the components nominally designed to touch the oxidizer were "passivated." The thin oxide coating which forms on the metal surface during passivation, renders the surface non-reactive to hydrogen peroxide and prevents the metal from decomposing the peroxide. After the system was passivated, reassembled, and leak check, a preliminary set of "warm-flow" tests were performed to assess the effectiveness of a stand-alone catbed design without the arc ignition system active. Following this test series, the arc-ignition system was activated and the effectiveness of the two previously described catbeds using silver and manganese dioxide were assessed. All peroxide tests were performed at USU within the on-campus test cell located in the Engineering Technology Building.

#### Q. Hot Fire Test Instrumentation

Figure 23 shows the custom test cart layout. The load structure was fabricated using commercially available aluminum "t-slot." The catalyst bed holder of Fig. 12 was installed the just upstream of the injector cap. In order to aid catalyticity a 100-watt external band heater<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup> was also installed around the catbed holder. The system uses nitrogen as a pressurant and carbon dioxide to operate all of the pneumatic ball valves. A separate  $CO_2$  purge system was also installed. All of the key test components are visible and labeled except for the  $N_2$  Pressurant,  $CO_2$  purge, and  $GOX$  secondary injection tanks. Figure 23 also shows where the secondary  $GOX$  feed line is tee'd into the injector cap. The injector cap lies inside of the thrust chamber and is not visible in this image.

<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup> 1-Piece Mica Insulated Band Heater, [https://www.omega.com/pptst/MB-1\\_HEATER.html](https://www.omega.com/pptst/MB-1_HEATER.html), [Retrieved 18 July, 2018]



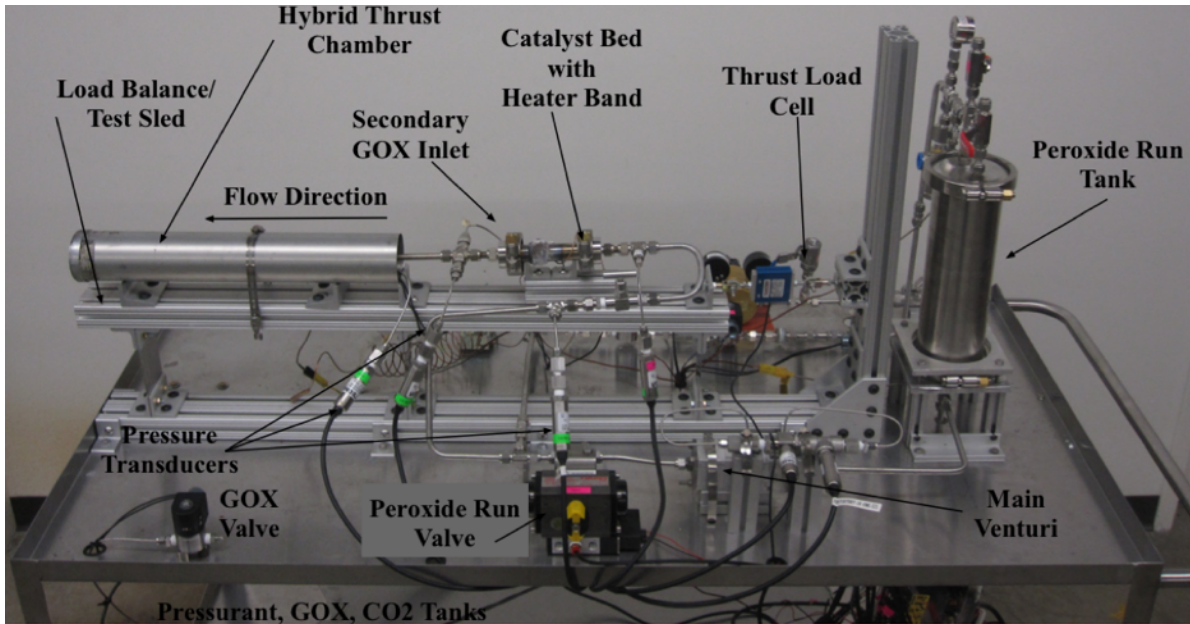


Figure 23. Hot-Fire Test Stand Instrumentation Layout.

Figure 24 shows the Piping and Instrumentation Diagram (P&ID) of the System. The system features a 1-liter capacity run tank pressurized by nitrogen gas. The GOX, N<sub>2</sub>, and CO<sub>2</sub> tanks are all independently controlled using manually set regulators. The catbed inlet and outlet pressures and the motor head-end chamber pressure are also measured. The flow temperature at the catbed outlet is sensed with a TC-probe inserted into the flow field. Two calibrated venturi flow meters are installed allowing measurement of both the peroxide and GOX flow rates.

The data acquisition and control system was all contained within a single box mounted to the lower shelf of the test cart. Two National Instruments data acquisition and control devices manage motor fire control, and test data logging. Operators and experimenters are remotely located in a secure control room separated from the test area. Communications to the test stand are managed by an operator-controlled laptop via universal serial bus (USB) using amplified extension cables.

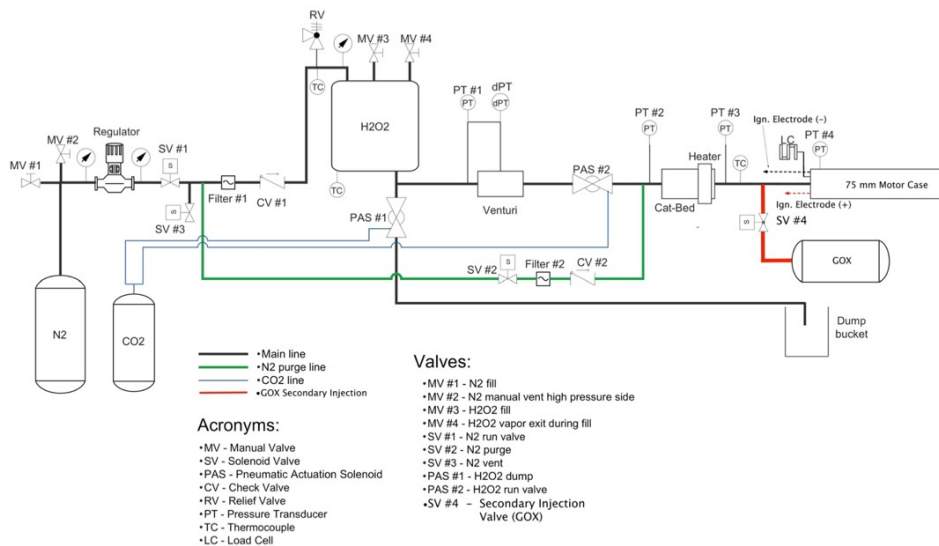


Figure 24: Piping and Instrumentation Diagram of Motor Test Systems.

### R. Silver Screen Catalyst Hot Flow Test Results

A baseline series of tests were performed using the #2 Runckel catbed design, both in stand-alone (no arc-ignition) and augmentation (with arc-ignition) modes. These baseline results demonstrated that the arc-ignition is still necessary

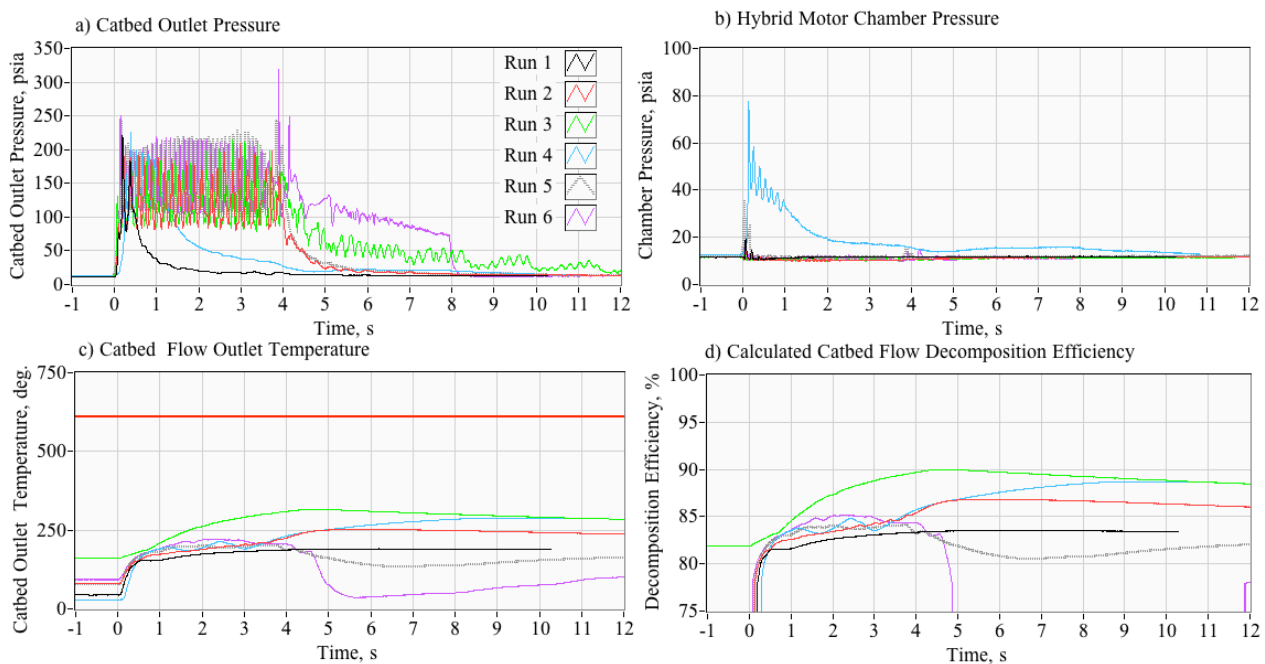
in order to achieve full hybrid combustion for moderate peroxide concentrations ( $< 91\%$ ). Both nitric acid and samarium nitrate treated silver screens were tested; however, but for the one samarium nitrate test performed nearly no catalytic activity was observed, and as a cost saving measure no further tests were performed using this treatment method.

#### Silver-Screen Catbed Tests with no Arc-Ignition

As mentioned previously, the first tests in this series attempted to achieve ignition using only the #2 Runckel silver screen catbed with the arc-ignition system inactive. Example catalyst-only test results are presented by Figures 25 and 26. Figure 25 shows the results of 6 hot-fire tests performed using the silver screen catalyst pre-treated using nitric acid. For these tests the peroxide concentrations varied from 81% to 88%, with a mean value of 84%. For the initial run the catbed preheater was inactive, and was adjusted to higher heating levels for each subsequent run. Plotted are (a) Downstream Catbed Pressure, (b) Chamber Pressure, (c) Catbed Exit Temperature, and (d) the Calculated Decomposition Efficiency. The theoretical 100% decomposition temperature ( $610\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) for an 84% concentration peroxide solution is also plotted on Fig. 25(c). The decomposition efficiency (d) is estimated by comparing the catbed exhaust temperature against the temperature-efficiency data plotted on Fig. 15.

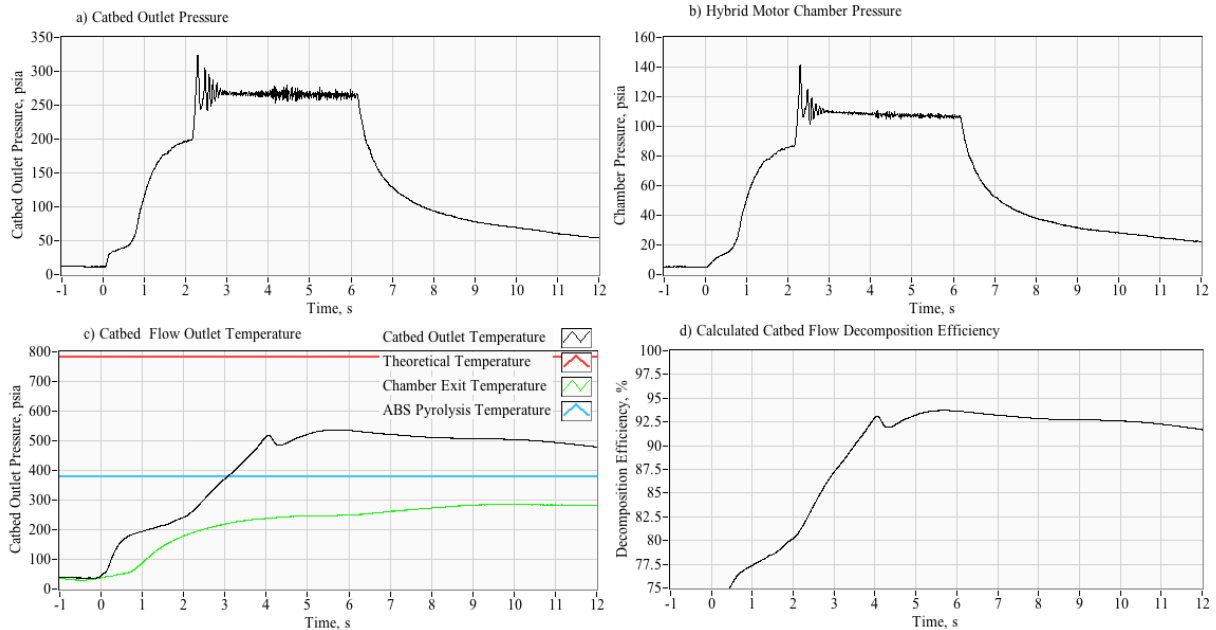
Increasing levels of catalyst activity were observed as the heater output wattage was raised. However, except for one case, the chamber pressure does not build up. Based on these results, it is concluded that liquid water has re-condensed and the nozzle exit remains un-choked. As the plume exits the injector and rapidly expands entering the combustion chamber, the plume super cools and temperature drops below  $100\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ . The "soaked" fuel grains will simply not ignite. For all 6 of the trials plotted by Fig. 25, liquid peroxide and condensed water were observed shooting from the nozzle exit.

Figure 26 shows the results of a follow on test using a 91% peroxide solution -- the maximum concentration allowed by the project safety rules. The catalyst bed heater was not used for this run. A thermocouple was also placed at the nozzle exit to record the exhaust temperature. In this case, using the higher concentration peroxide pushed the catbed exit temperature up to over  $500\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ , and the chamber pressure rises to greater than 100 psia. However, even though the decomposition efficiency exceeds 90%, due to plume expansion the chamber flow temperatures were still insufficient to pyrolyze the hybrid fuel. Figure 26(c) shows this comparison. The combustor temperature rises to slightly less than  $300\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ , but it still well below the nominal ABS pyrolysis temperature of  $300\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Consequently, only a smoldering "monopropellant" type of burn occurs. Achieved thrust levels for this burn were still low, less than 40 N compared to the 140 N achieved for full combustion, as shown by Fig. 4. Based on the data of Figure 16 and assuming the same level of 90% decomposition efficiency, a concentration of 98-99% peroxide would be necessary to raise the chamber temperature sufficiently to pyrolysis the fuel. Fuel pyrolysis is necessary for full combustion to begin.



**Figure 25. Unsuccessful Hot-Fire Ignition Tests of 75 mm Hybrid with 84% Peroxide, Nitric**

### Acid Treated Silver Catalyst Bed Design (Runkel #2).



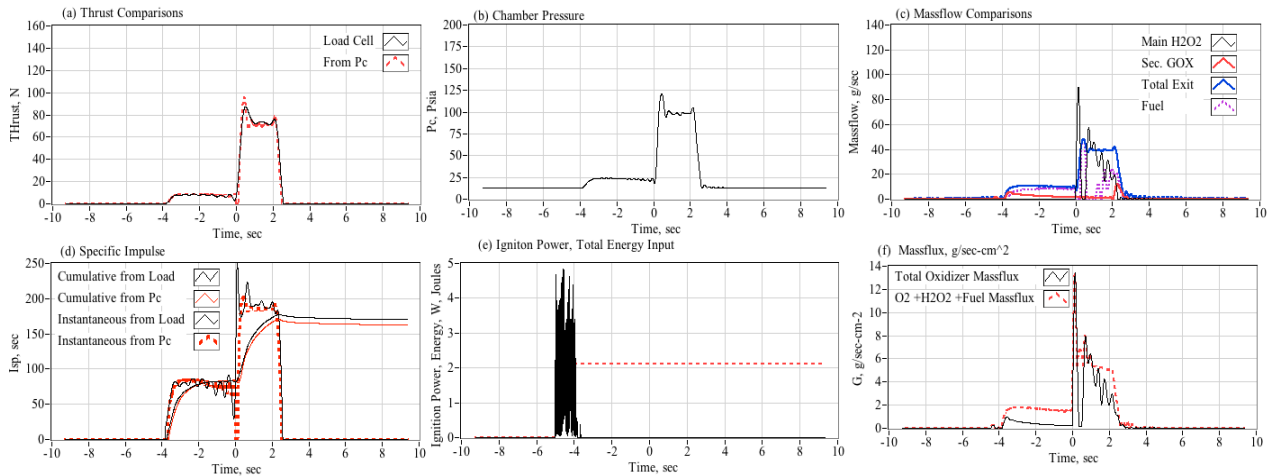
**Figure 26. Unsuccessful Hot-Fire Ignition Test of 75 mm Hybrid with 91% Peroxide, Nitric Acid Treated Silver Catalyst Bed Design (Runkel #2).**

#### Thermal-catalytic Silver Screen Hot-Fire Tests with Arc-Ignition Augmentation

Following the unsuccessful silver-screen catalyst-only tests whose results were presented in the previous section using the silver screen catbed, a series of tests were performed where both the catbed and arc ignition system were installed and operable. Because the GOX pre-lead has the effect of significantly raising the chamber pressure before peroxide injection, the entering decomposition products do not super-cool and return to liquid phase. As a result, these tests achieved considerably more success. Multiple successful full-burns were achieved with various levels of GOX-pre-lead.

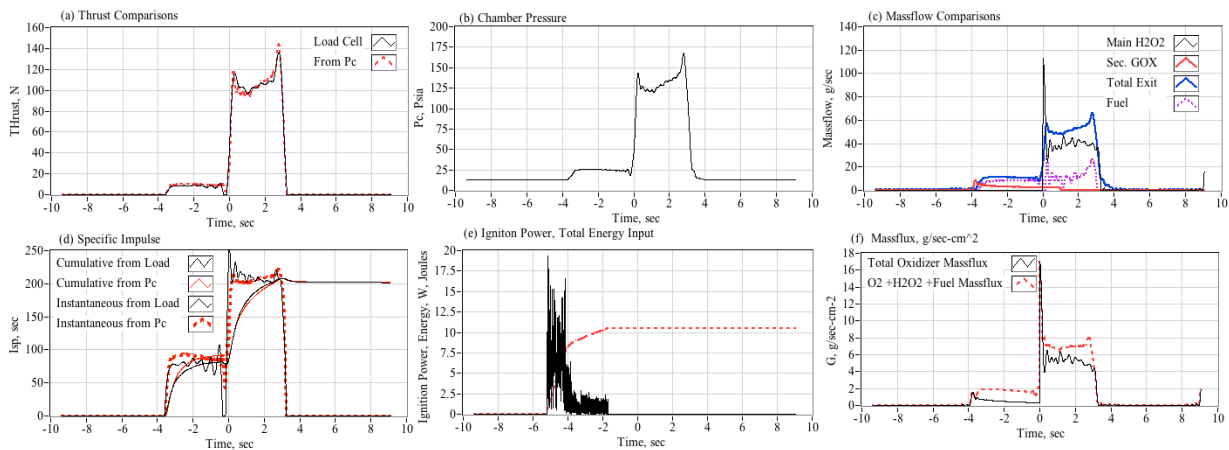
Figure 27 shows an early cold-start test result where the catbed heater was not activated. Here the ignition spark precedes the GOX flow by 1-second, and the GOX flow -- controlled by a separate solenoid run valve -- was set to pre-lead the peroxide flow by approximately 3 seconds. Plotted are time histories of (a) thrust, (b) chamber pressure, (c) total, main, secondary, and fuel massflow, (d) specific impulse, (e) ignition input wattage and total ignition energy, and (f) oxidizer and total massflux. The time scale has been configured to have the zero point coincide with opening of the peroxide run valve. Note on Figures 27 (a) and (b) that once the peroxide valve opens there is an immediate rise in chamber pressure and thrust level. The addition of the catalyst augmentation significantly reduces the ignition latency and the flood of unburned peroxide into the thrust chamber compared to arc-ignition only data presented by Fig. 4. The  $I_{sp}$  plot shows that there still is some residual burn inefficiency. The initial burst of unburned  $H_2O_2$  results in an approximately 5-8 percent reduction of the cumulative  $I_{sp}$  compared to the instantaneous value.

Also note that even though the same upstream regulator setting approximately 400 psia used was identical to that used for Figure 4, the achieved chamber pressure and thrust levels are reduced by approximately 45%. This drop is a result of stagnation pressure losses across the catbed. The initial GOX flow ignition, followed by the complete peroxide ignition is clearly visible in the thrust (a) and chamber pressure (b) plot contours. Once  $H_2O_2$  "ignition" results the thrust and chamber pressure levels jump by factors between 12-15 times. The relative  $H_2O_2$  to GOX massflow varies between ratios of approximately 10-20.

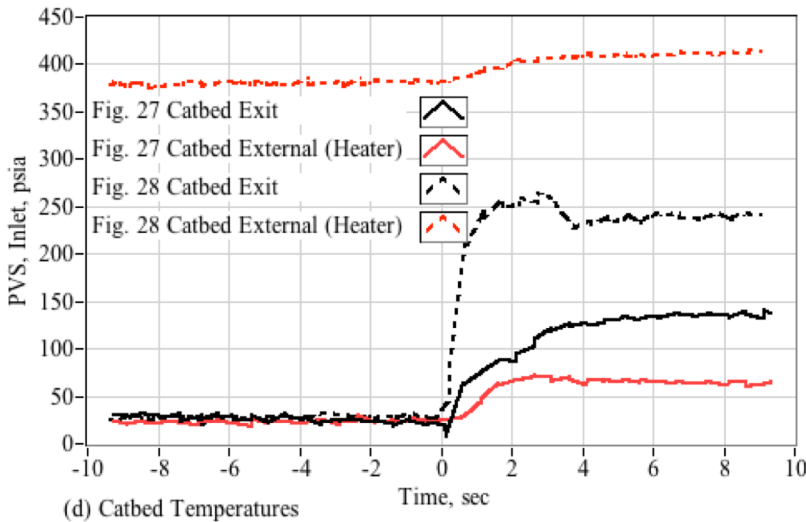


**Figure 27: Preliminary Hot-Fire Test Using 87% H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> with Silver Catbed Augmenting GOX Arc-Ignition, Pre-Heat Inactive.**

Figure 28 shows a repeat test of the previous configuration, except now the regulator outlet pressure has been set to max outlet setting of 500 psia and the catbed heater has been set to a full wattage output, approximately a 400 °C temperature level. The thrust and chamber pressure levels are still a bit lower than were achieved by the burn of Fig. 4, again primarily due to pressure losses across the catbed. The ignition transient has now been substantially reduced, and only a short duration spike in the unburned peroxide mass flow is noted in Fig 28 (c). Also note that the peroxide flow is considerably more stable indicating that the hot catbed has the effect of eliminating the majority of the two phase flow issues. Finally, it is noted that the cumulative Isp is now just 2-3% lower than the peak instantaneous value, indicating that very little total impulse has been lost due to the ignition transient. Also the overall  $I_{sp}$  is approximately 5% higher.



**Figure 28: Preliminary Hot-Fire Test Using 87% H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> with Silver Catbed Augmenting GOX Arc-Ignition, Pre-Heat Set at Full Wattage Level.**



**Figure 29. Catbed External and Plume Temperatures with and without Catbed Heating.**

0.4 J/g-K and a heating efficiency of 05%, then heating the stack from ambient temperature to 400 °C consumes approximately 180 kJ.<sup>§§§§§</sup> This consumed-energy value is nearly 5 orders of magnitude greater than the required input energy or the arc ignition system

#### S. Warm Flow Catbed-Only Catbed Tests with Manganese Dioxide

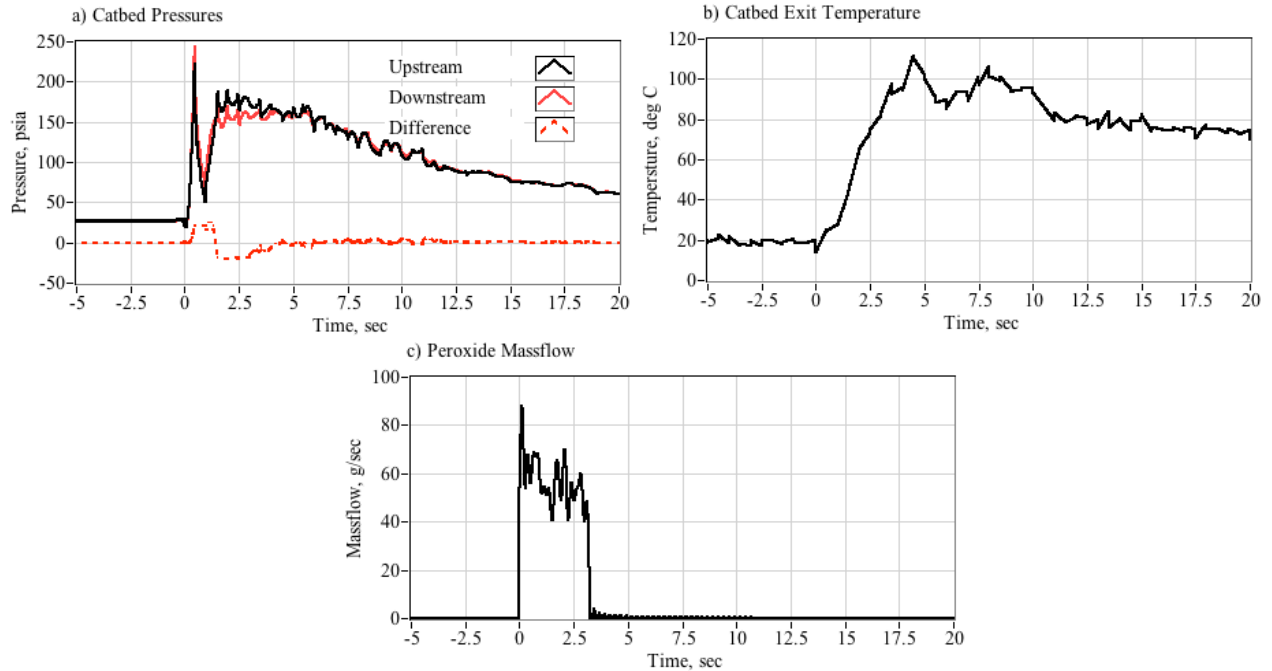
Before a hot fire was conducted with the MnO<sub>2</sub> pellet-bed catalyst, two "warm fire" catbed-only tests were performed. The hybrid combustion chamber was removed and the tests consisted of running the peroxide solution through the catalyst bed and injector, and then dumping to ambient conditions. The goal was to establish a baseline for the outlet temperature and pressure drop across the catalyst bed. These tests had been previously performed by Whitmore et al [45] for the Runckel silver screen catbed design, and will not be reported here. The warm flow tests were repeated twice with the same catalyst materials in order to identify any potential deactivation issues and assure that the pellet beds survive the temperatures of decomposition.

Figure 30 presents a typical result where the upstream and downstream catbed pressures as well as the pressure difference are plotted by 30(a) and the decomposition temperature at the catbed exit is plotted by 30(b). Figure 30(c) plots the peroxide massflow. The "burn" lasted approximately 3 seconds, and mean peroxide massflow of approximately 60 grams/s was reached. The heater band was not used for these tests. The thermocouple for this test was not positioned directly in the flow path, and this small temperature rise of slightly above 90 °C is a likely cause of this bad positioning. From observation, the housing of the catalyst bed got quite hot and was visibly smoking at the test's end. Interestingly, although there is the expected pressure drop across the catbed during the main flow, there is a pressure rise across the catbed as the burn completes. This rise is caused by the residual peroxide strongly decomposing along the length of the catbed lasts for several seconds after the burn. The liberated oxygen gas from decomposition likely results in the pressure rise. Clearly, at least moderate catalytic activity is indicated by the observed temperature and pressure traces.

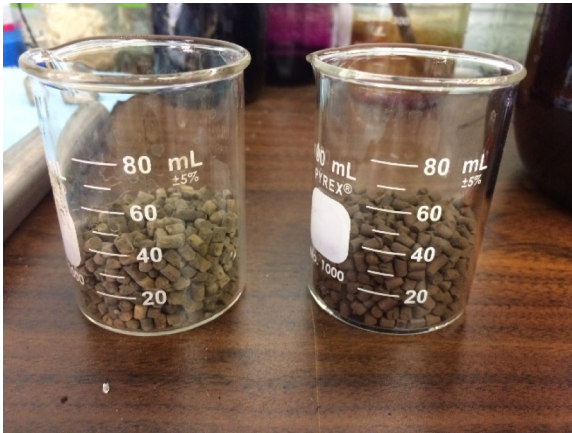
<sup>§§§§§</sup> This value is consistent with the observation that it took approximately 30 minutes or 1800 seconds for the 100-watt band heater to heat the installed catbed fixture to a maximum temperature of 400 °C.

Unfortunately, it appears that with the current state of this design that a full catbed reheat to at least 300 degrees is required in order to achieve full ignition augmentation. Figure 29 compares the catbed external temperatures, and the catbed exit temperatures for the data of Figs. 27 and 28. Clearly, the catbed preheat has a significant effect on the exit temperature and is a primary driver for the performance differences exhibited by the burns of Fig 27 and 28.

Unfortunately, this preheat performance enhancement does come at a considerable energy cost. As mentioned earlier entire silver-screen catbed stack in this case weigh approximately 620 grams. Assuming a mean specific heat of



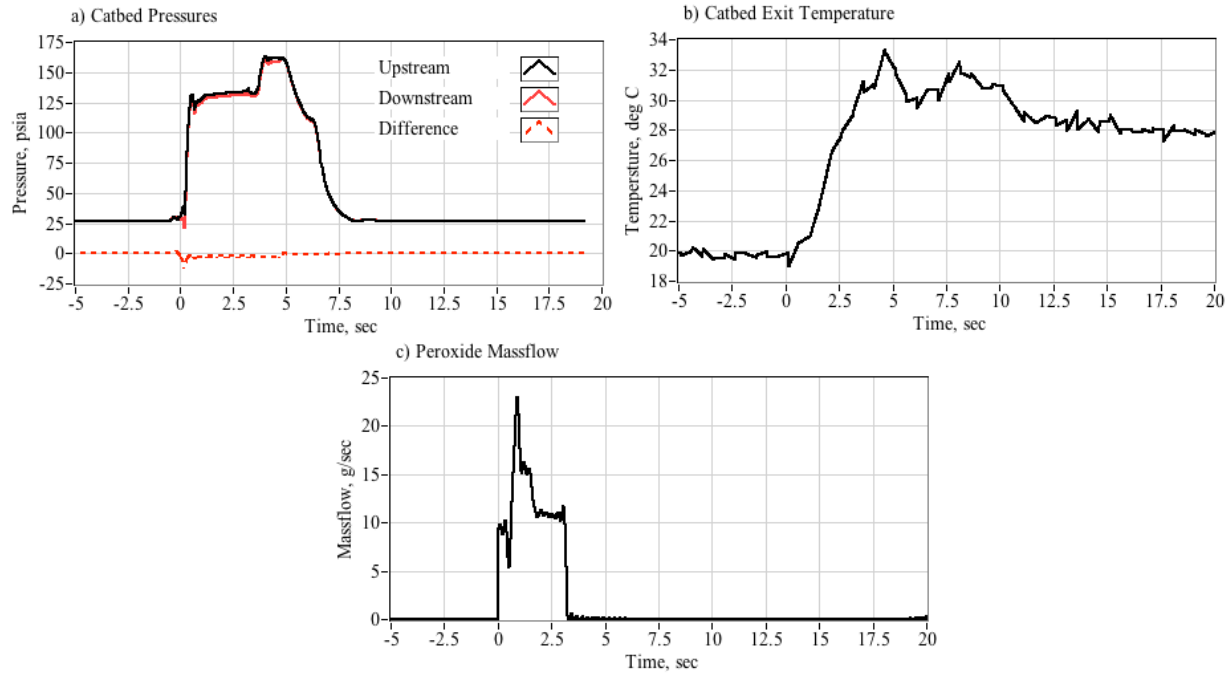
**Figure 30: Initial MnO<sub>2</sub> Warm Flow, Pressure, Temperature, Massflow Across Catbed, 80% Peroxide Solution.**



**Figure 31: Pellets after Warm Firings (left). Fresh Pellets Before Firing (right).**

A second warm fire replicating the conditions of the first burn was performed, with the only difference being that the catalyst material was reused from the first burn. Figure 31 compares the pellets following burn two with a freshly coated set of pellets. The reacted pellets took on a lighter brown color, in contrast to their initial dark brown color. This change in color is indicative of a change in their catalytic effectiveness.

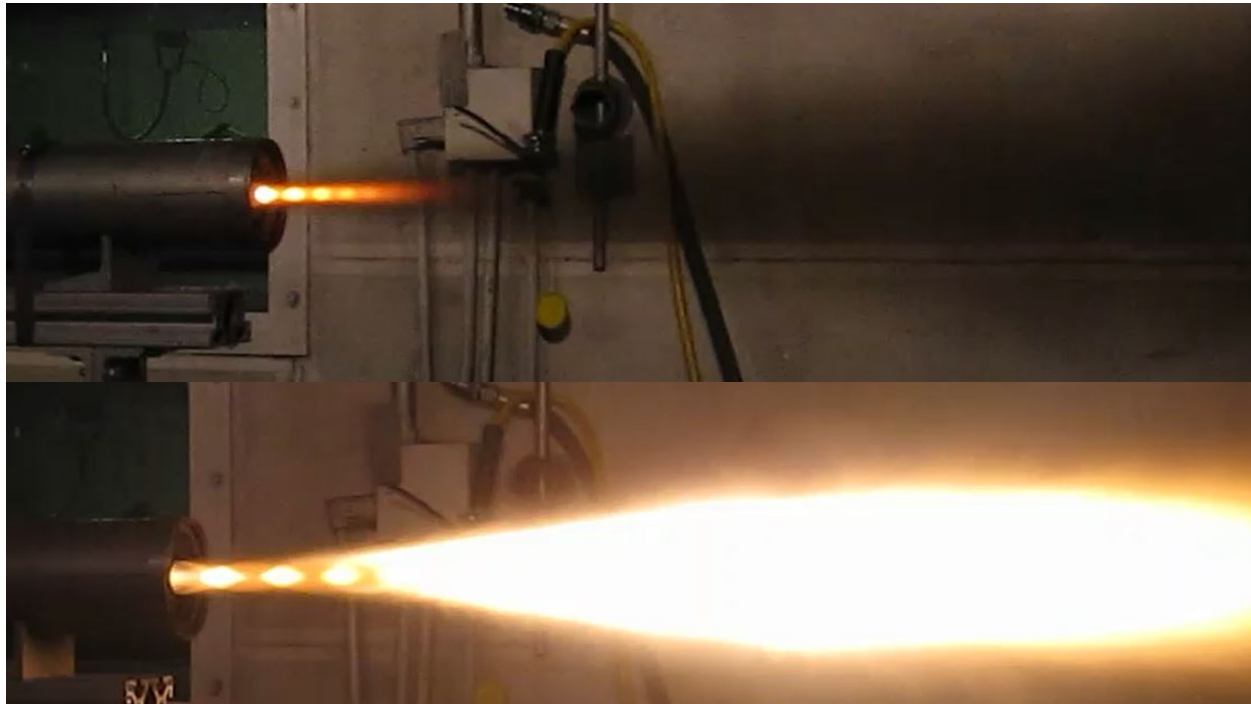
The results, plotted by Figure 31, verify this drop in effectiveness; only minor pressure drop and temperature increase were experienced. Whether this reactivity remains constant after the initial drop or continues dropping is a subject of potential future research. Clearly, lifetime durability is a potential issue with this catalyst design.



**Figure 32: Repeat MnO<sub>2</sub> Warm Flow, Pressure, Temperature, Massflow Across Catbed, 80% Peroxide Solution.**

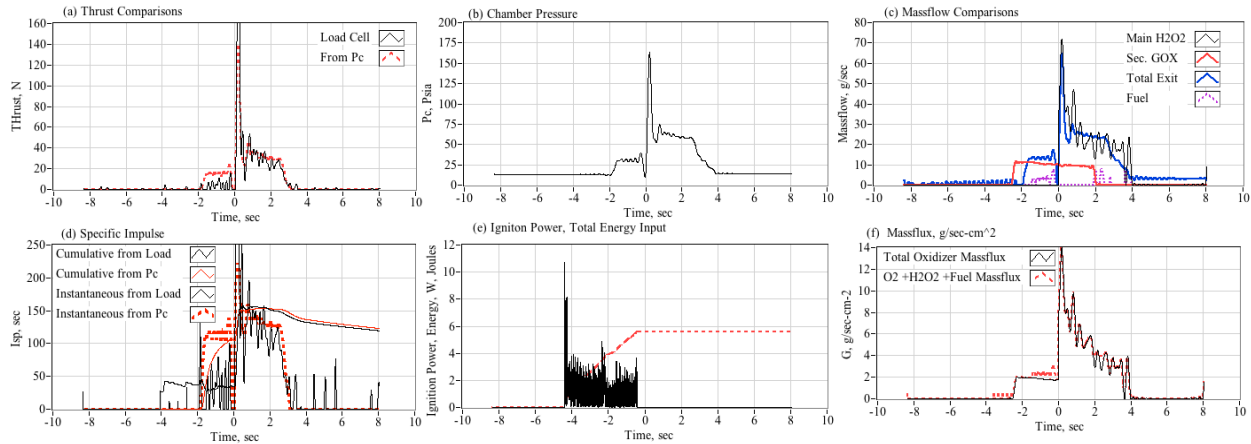
**T. Initial Manganese Dioxide Pellet Bed Hot Flow Test Results**

To date only two hot fire tests of the MnO<sub>2</sub> pellet augmentation catalyst have only been performed. Results have only been marginally successful. Figure 33 shows an example test firing behavior. The top image occurs shortly after the peroxide is injected into the combustion chamber. This wet burn mode lasts only a few microseconds. The bottom is the steady state burn as full combustion is achieved. Although, this burn sequence looks normal, inspection of the time history plots reveals the pathological nature of the burn. Figure 34 presents this data.



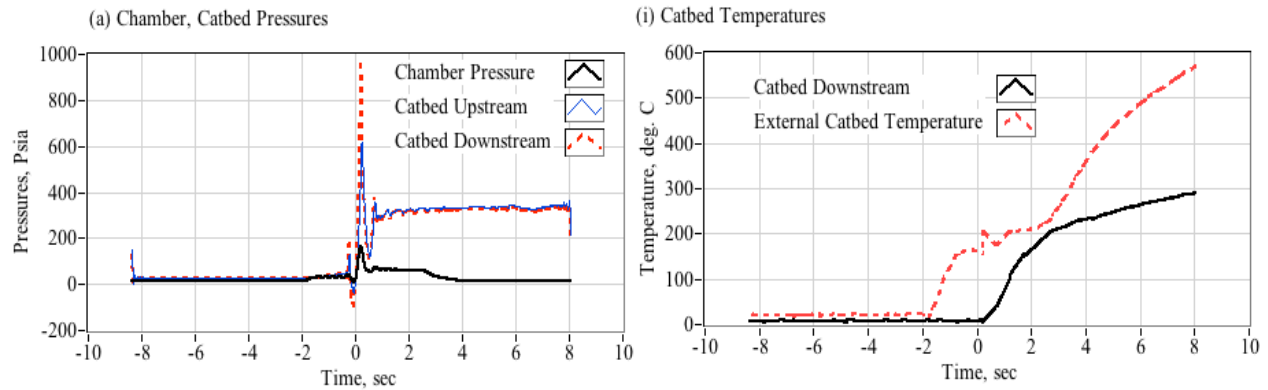
**Figure 33: Initial and Steady State Burn Images, Arc-Ignition with MnO<sub>2</sub> Catbed Augmentation.**

Plotted are (a) directly measured (load cell) thrust and thrust calculated from chamber pressure using the De Laval flow equations, (b) chamber pressure, (c) GOX, peroxide, nozzle exit, and fuel massflow rates, (d) cumulative and instantaneous specific impulse values as calculated using both measured and calculated thrust levels, (e) input power and energy levels, and (f) the oxidizer and total massflow through the fuel port. Although the ignition appears to proceed normally with a sharp initial rise in chamber pressure, shortly after full ignition there is a significant drop off in chamber pressure, thrust, and oxidizer massflow.



**Figure 34: Response Time History of First MnO<sub>2</sub> Augmentation, Arc Ignition Hot Fire Test, 88% Peroxide Concentration.**

Post-test examination of the catbed revealed the cause of this anomalous behavior. Once the catbed housing bed was opened the residue of multiple crushed pellets was discovered. This debris had the effect of plugging the catbed flow path, starving off the peroxide flow to the combustion chamber. In fact, the plug was so substantial that the catbed remained sealed at high pressure. Figure 35 presents data to support this statement. Figure 35(a) compares the chamber pressure to the internal catbed pressures. Notice that even after the flow has terminated the internal catbed pressures remain high, at nearly 350 psia. Similarly, the internal catbed temperatures continue to rise, even after flow termination. This rise is indicative on peroxide trapped inside of the catbed housing continuing to react with the MnO<sub>2</sub>. This behavior has occurred in both MnO<sub>2</sub> catbed test, and is indicative of a structural design flaw in the MnO<sub>2</sub> catbed configuration. On a positive note, the Manganese Dioxide catalyst shows excellent activity properties, even when the support material is crushed.



**Figure 35: MnO<sub>2</sub> Catbed Pressure and Temperature Traces Showing Flow Path Blockage Due to Crushed Alumina Pellets.**

**IX. Conclusion**

The authors have a prototype hybrid rocket that uses 85%-90% hydrogen peroxide solution and 3-D printed ABS as propellants. In the original system design the peroxide catalyst bed was completely removed and a patented arc-ignition system thermally ignited the propellants. The thermal ignition system was effective but resulted in a



combustion latency of approximately 1-second, reducing overall performance and allowing for significant variability in the delivered total impulse. This work investigates whether adding a small catalyst pack for ignition augmentation can eliminate or significantly reduce the observed ignition latency and improve overall system performance.

Noble-metal catalysts have long been the "go-to" technology for monopropellant applications. Unfortunately, noble-metal catalyst has several known issues. For example, the raw material required to build even a moderate massflow catalyst bed from noble metals can easily exceed one or more thousands of dollars. Because each catalyst bed is individually hand-crafted and assembled in a one-off manner; manufacturing labor costs add significantly to the system cost. Catalyst beds fabricated from noble metals are extremely heavy and contribute nothing to the propulsive mass of the system.

Noble metal catalyst beds also have significant operational durability issues. Because the catalytic activity of the catalyst depends upon the available surface area indirect contact with the solution, oxidization due heating generally reduces the effectiveness of the catalyst bed. Similarly, stabilizers like tin salts, phosphates, nitrates, added to preserve the peroxide solution have the effect of reducing the catalyst surface area, and may in effect "poison" a working catbed rendering it ineffective. When working with higher concentrations of peroxide, the decomposition temperature can reach or even exceed the melting temperature of the noble-metal catalyst material. The result is a long term deforming, sintering, and potentially plugging the flow path. All these lead to a decrease in the performance and eventual failure of the catalyst bed. This lack of durability further adds to the costs of using silver or platinum in the catbed design.

Thus, in light of the aforementioned drawbacks with silver catalysts, and considering that the desired objective is to develop a simple, light -weight, inexpensive catbed design that will act to "assist" the primary arc-ignition system; there are clearly a variety of options that can be reconsidered. Because the catalyst is not required to fully decompose the injected peroxide stream, industry standard silver catalysts used for mono-propellants can be replaced with significantly lower-cost materials. This paper has identified well-known and existing material alternatives, and considered how those alternatives can be best adapted to meet the stated project objectives. For this study two different augmentation catalyst designs were down-selected for hot-fire testing. The first design was based on a traditional compressed silver screen stack support by stainless steel baffles. This traditional design was previously used by Runckel at al. with 98% monopropellant peroxide. The second design uses the same external form factor, but replaces the silver-screen stack with  $\alpha$ -alumina pellets impregnated with manganese dioxide.

A series of baseline tests were performed to assess the comparative reactivity of silver screen with the  $MnO_2$  pellets. These tests identified a nitric acid treatment as the best method for pre-activating of the silver screens. The samarium nitrate treatment recommended by Runckel was generally found to be ineffective for the 90% and lower peroxide concentrations preferred for hybrid applications. The  $MnO_2$  pellets were found to be 20-25% more effective than the silver screen catalysts. Samarium nitrate treatments are not recommended for medium grade peroxide applications.

Thus far results obtained via hot fire testing of the silver screens augmentation catalyst were moderately successful. Although the Runckel silver-screen catbed was unable to operate as a stand-alone ignition unit; it was able to successfully operate as an augment catalyst. The tests demonstrate that, when preheated, the silver catalysts effectively remove the arc-ignition latency and significantly improves the total specific impulse of the motor. This benefit come; however, at a steep energy price. Heating the catbed stack to an operating temperature of 400 °C requires approximately 180 kJ. This consumed-energy value is nearly 5 orders of magnitude greater than the required input energy or the arc ignition system.

The two burns performed to date using the  $MnO_2$  pellet catalyst have been only marginally successful. For both burns the ignition appears to proceed normally with a sharp initial rise in chamber pressure and very little pressure rise latency. However, shortly after full ignition there is a significant drop off in chamber pressure, thrust, and oxidizer massflow. Post-test examination of the catbed revealed the cause of this anomalous behavior. Once the catbed housing bed was opened the residue of multiple crushed pellets was discovered. This debris had the effect of plugging the catbed flow path, starving off the peroxide flow to the combustion chamber. This behavior has occurred with both hot fire tests, and is indicative of a structural design flaw. On a positive note,

Before additional testing is performed the support  $\alpha$ -alumina material must be replaced with a structurally stronger alternative. A complete redesign of the catalyst bed support and housing is being performed. Literature research has shown that the mechanical strength of the pellets can be improved with lanthanum doping. Also using a titanium dioxide support material to replace could prove promising and only add moderate expense. Methods for impregnating the fuel material itself with  $MnO_2$  will also be investigated.

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