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A METHOD FOR THE REAL-TIME MEASUREMENT OF PROJECTILE IN-BORE VELOCITY

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Accurate projectile velocity and displacement measurements are imperative to many ballistic studies. The Interior Ballistics Division (IBD) of the Ballistic Research Laboratory (BRL) routinely uses microwave interferometry to obtain projectile displacement versus time records during the interior ballistic cycle. This report describes the setup of a microwave interferometer to obtain projectile displacement and velocity data. A discussion of some possible sources of error and the factors which limit the resolution of the measurements is also included. Finally, a novel technique is presented for processing the analog interferometer signal in real time to obtain projectile velocity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Accurate projectile velocity and displacement measurements are imperative to many ballistic studies. The Interior Ballistic Division (IBD) of the Ballistic Research Laboratory (BRL) routinely uses microwave interferometry to obtain projectile displacement versus time records during the interior ballistic cycle. A microwave interferometer signal is reflected into the gun tube, off the front of the projectile, and back to the receiving antenna (see Figure 1). As the projectile moves, the path of the signal is reduced in length by one wavelength for each one-half wavelength of projectile travel. The phase of the reflected signal is then compared with the incident signal using a mixer and detector diode. The output of the detector is a periodic signal proportional to the displacement of the projectile; each cycle being equal to a projectile displacement of one-half wavelength of the incident signal. The signal can then be processed in real time to obtain the velocity versus time record of the projectile. It is not the author's objective to present a detailed discussion on the operation and physics of microwave interferometry techniques. The above description outlines the basic process. A more fundamental discussion can be found in the BRL Technical Report 968 (Vest et al. 1955).

"A Method for the Real-Time Measurement of Projectile In-bore Velocity" describes the setup of a microwave interferometer to obtain projectile displacement and velocity data. Next, is a discussion of some possible sources of error and the factors which limit the resolution of the measurements. Finally, a novel technique is presented for processing the analog interferometer signals in real time to obtain projectile velocity.

2. MICROWAVE INTERFEROMETER SETUP

Figure 1 shows a typical range setup for using a microwave interferometer to obtain in-bore displacement versus time data for a projectile. Electromagnetic energy in the form of a radio frequency (RF) signal is propagated down the bore of the gun, usually off an expendable reflector such as a square of aluminum faced foam core insulation board, or an aluminum pie plate. These reflectors are needed to be able to offset the interferometer from the line of fire. A hand-held feed horn and a detector diode with a current meter are used when aligning the reflector so that the maximum amount of energy is reflected down the bore of the gun. Adjustments are made to the reflector screen so that the maximum current reading is attained, first at the muzzle of the gun, and then at the breech, if possible.

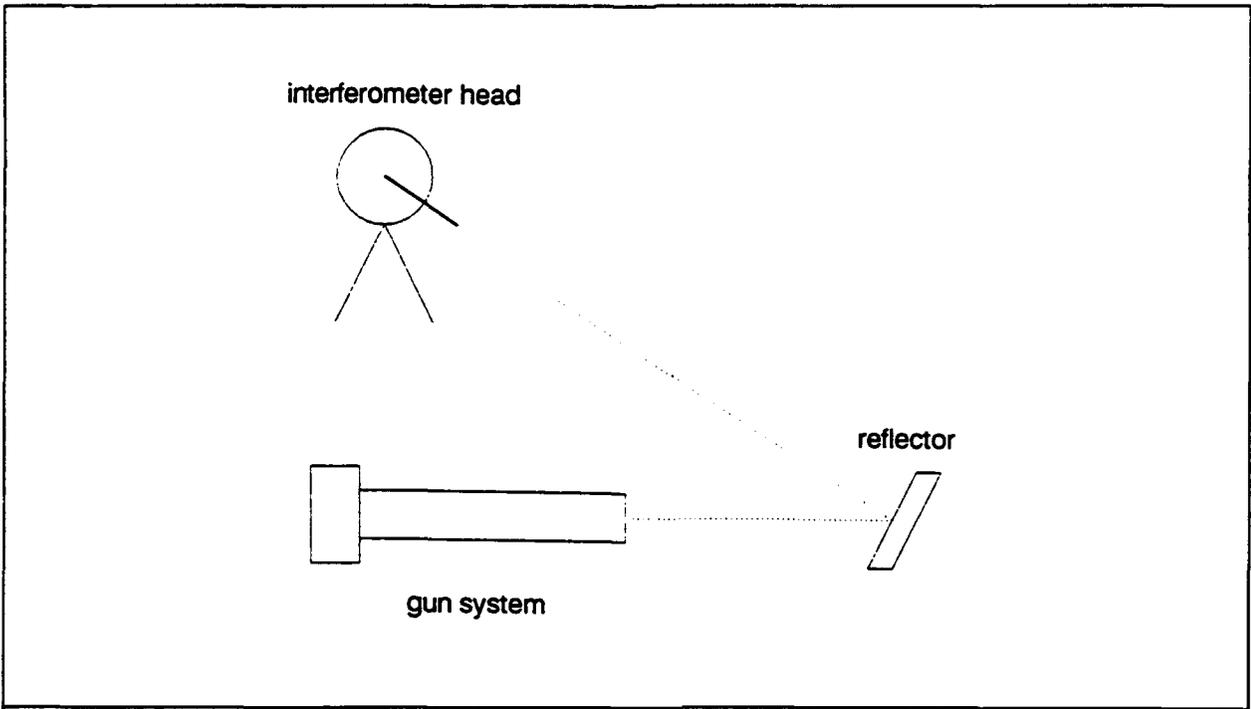


Figure 1. A Typical Range Setup For Using a Microwave Interferometer to Obtain In-bore Projectile Displacement.

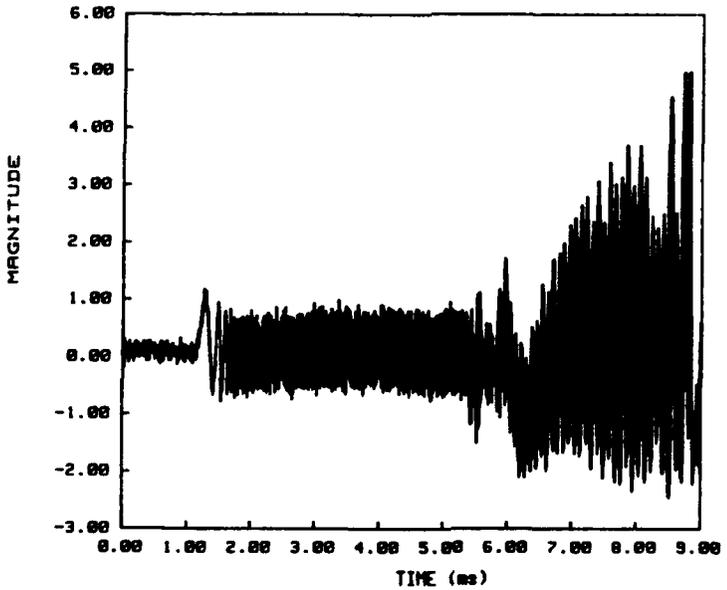


Figure 2. A Typical Interferometer Record.

As the projectile moves down the tube, it will introduce phase changes in the RF signal, which, when mixed with the residual signal at the receiver detector, will produce an interference pattern. Figure 2 shows an interference pattern, more commonly known as an interferometer record.

For each cycle of the interferometer signal, one-half of the wavelength of the transmitted RF signal in the gun tube has been traversed by the projectile. Because the gun tube acts as a circular waveguide when propagating the transmission frequency, the wavelength in the gun tube, λ_g , is slightly different than the freespace wavelength of the transmitted frequency, λ . The formulas used to calculate both λ and λ_g are given below (Evans 1985; Ware and Reed 1958).

$$\lambda = \frac{c}{f} \quad \text{and} \quad \lambda_g = \left[\left(\frac{f}{c} \right)^2 - \left(\frac{p}{\pi d} \right)^2 \right]^{-1/2}$$

where:

f = source frequency

c = speed of light

d = gun tube diameter

p = Bessel Function root depending on mode of wave propagation (p = 1.84 for the TE₁₁ mode which is considered the dominant mode and will be used for all calculations in this paper).

A count of the total number of cycles from the onset of projectile motion determines the distance that the projectile has traveled at any point in time. In addition, the frequency of the signal at any instant is directly proportional to the velocity of the projectile.

There are several practical details that the user must be aware of to insure good interferometer data. As noted previously, the gun tube acts as a circular wave guide when propagating a transmitted signal. Therefore one must make sure that the transmitted frequency of the microwave interferometer being used is above the cutoff frequency of the tube. This cutoff frequency is given by (Vest 1955):

$$f_c = \frac{cp}{\pi d}$$

Figure 3 shows a plot of λ_g versus gun tube diameter for various source frequencies, f . The concept of cutoff frequency can be seen by inspection of this graph. For example, a 10 GHz interferometer will not propagate in a gun tube with a diameter less than 18 mm. One can also see that the higher the transmitted frequency, the higher the resolution of

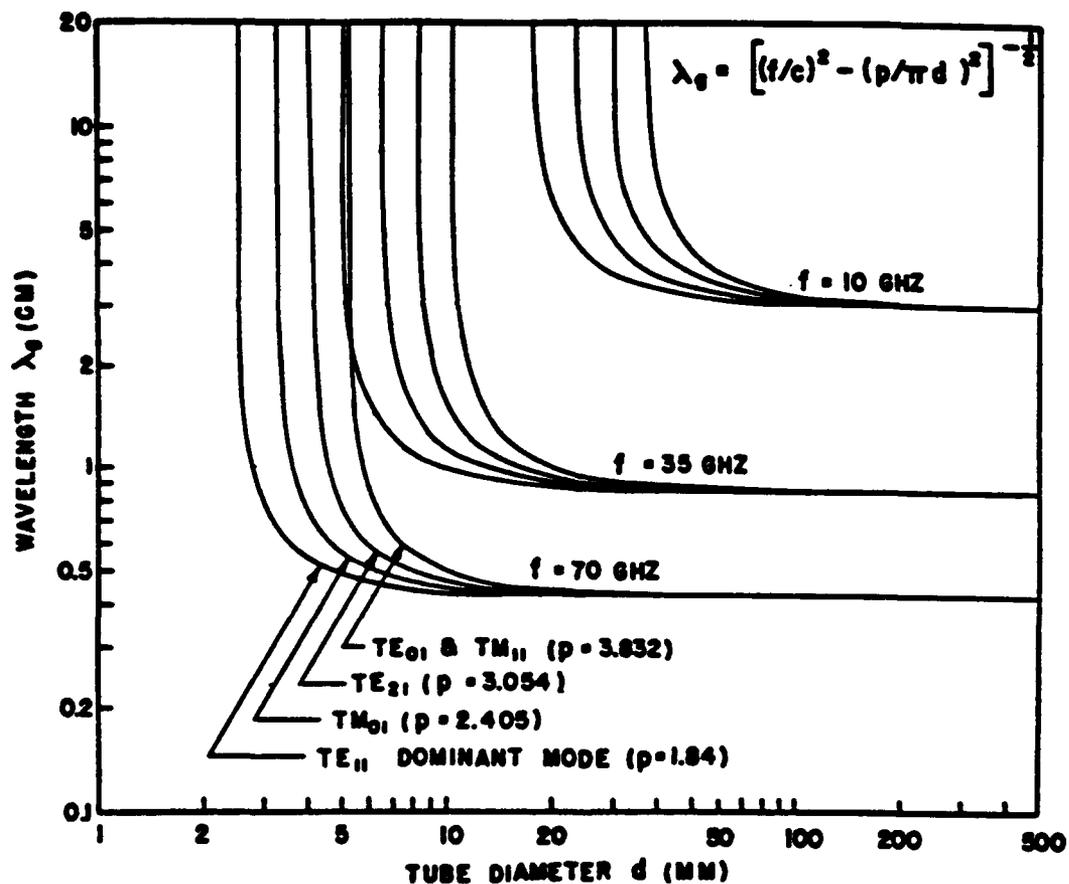


Figure 3. A Graph of Wavelength in the Gun Tube Versus Gun Tube Diameter For Given Source Frequencies.

the measurement. This is because the wavelength will be shorter, resulting in more cycles per unit of travel.

The recoil of the gun tube and the mount can cause problems with the measurement. The motion of the gun tube and mount also reflect the incident signal back to the antenna. This results in a larger low-frequency signal being superimposed on the projectile displacement signal. To alleviate this problem, an RF wave absorbing material is placed on the face of the gun tube, and mount if possible, to absorb the incident energy instead of reflecting it.

This system is easy to set up and use. However, it does have two major limitations. First, projectiles with pointed noses, or ogives, reflect the incident RF signal at various angles inside and outside the gun tube. This causes dispersion of the interferometer signal. At the present time, investigations continue in an effort to quantify the minimum flat reflective surface requirements that projectiles must have in order to produce usable interferometer data. At this time we can only say that it is very important to have a flat, metallic surface on the front of the projectile to reflect the RF signal. Second, good obturation is necessary to prevent ionized gases from leaking around the projectile. These ionized gases disperse the RF signal causing attenuation of the reflected signal. In turn, this may cause the signal to be lost in the noise of the system. This effect can be seen in a good interferometer record just as the projectile exits the muzzle. At this instant, the ionized gases overrun the projectile and thus the interferometer signal is lost. As the projectile outruns the gases, the signal returns. It is important that these two limitations be considered when attempting to acquire useful microwave interferometer data.

3. ERRORS

There are several possible sources of error when using a microwave interferometer to measure in-bore projectile displacement and velocity. As noted earlier, the frequency of the interferometer signal over a finite period of time is directly proportional to the velocity of the projectile over that period of time. More specifically;

$$v = .5 \lambda_g * f$$

where:

v = velocity of the projectile

λ_g = wavelength of the incident RF signal in the gun tube

f = frequency of the interferometer signal over a finite time.

Note that the equation is multiplied by .5. This is because a full cycle of the resultant interferometer signal is equivalent to .5 λ_g of projectile travel. Obviously, any error in measuring the wavelength in the gun tube or the period of the interferometer signal will result in an error in the velocity measurement. It can be seen from the equation for λ_g on page three that λ_g is proportional to the source frequency and the gun tube diameter. A finite error can be associated with each of these parameters. One should actually measure the frequency of the microwave interferometer. This measurement can be performed very accurately using a precision high frequency counter. Another source of possible error is in measuring the diameter of the gun tube. Tubes can become worn and should be measured periodically. This measurement can be performed to within 1% for smooth gun tubes; however, measuring rifled tubes can be more difficult. The typical convention used in the IBD of the BRL is to measure the diameter between the lands. The error in calculating the wavelength in the gun tube caused by an error of 1% in measuring the tube will vary with tube diameter (decreases with increasing diameter) and source frequency (decreases with increasing frequency). The following examples, in the author's opinion, are considered typical applications. For a 30-mm gun tube and a 35 GHz microwave interferometer, the resultant error in calculating λ_g is .01%. For a 120-mm gun tube and a 15 GHz microwave interferometer, the resultant error is also .01%. However, for a 30-mm gun tube and 10 GHz microwave interferometer, the resultant error is .5 %. Obviously, the error can be significant if the microwave interferometer frequency is not suitable for the tube diameter. It is important to note that as the wavelength in the gun tube approaches freespace the error in measuring the diameter of the gun tube becomes negligible. However, near the cutoff frequency of the gun tube other modes of propagation can be excited further complicating the measurement. In general, the smaller the tube diameter, the higher the microwave interferometer frequency one should use. As pointed out earlier, this can be seen by inspecting the graph in Figure 3.

The largest error in calculating the velocity from an interferometer signal is in measuring the period of the cycles over a finite time. The measurement most often desired is the velocity of the projectile at the muzzle of the gun. When the projectile is located at the muzzle of the gun, the frequency of the corresponding interferometer signal is generally

quite high; therefore, it can be difficult to resolve the cycles of the interferometer signal accurately. This high frequency signal is resolved through the use of a high speed digitizer. The error involved in using a high speed digitizer to determine muzzle velocity is considered; if a 15 GHz microwave interferometer is used for a 120-mm gun firing, the projectile will travel 1.00409 cm per cycle of the interferometer signal (these values were obtained from the equation for λ_g). As the projectile begins to move, the resultant output from the interferometer becomes periodic, increasing in frequency as the projectile accelerates. At or near the muzzle, the projectile is traveling at nearly a constant speed, therefore, the frequency of the microwave interferometer output signal will be relatively constant. For a given time window, one can count the number of cycles, and since we know the displacement per cycle, λ_g , it is a trivial exercise to calculate the velocity. If there are 10 cycles of interferometer data in 66.9 micro-seconds, then we know that the projectile has traveled 10.0409 cm, and the velocity is 1500 m/s, assuming the frequency over those 10 cycles remained constant. The faster the digitizer, the more accurate the muzzle velocity determination will be because we can resolve the signal more accurately. If a 1 MHz sampling rate is used, a very conservative error would be 1%. It is actually possible to interpolate between points so that an accuracy of .5 % is possible. If a 10 MHz sampling rate is used, then the error would be less than .5%. If instead of using a higher sampling rate, one chooses to use more cycles of interferometer data in the calculation, the error would also be less than .5%.

If one chooses the correct microwave interferometer frequency for the gun tube diameter being used, and correctly measures that frequency and the tube diameter, then the error will be limited by the speed of the digitizer being used.

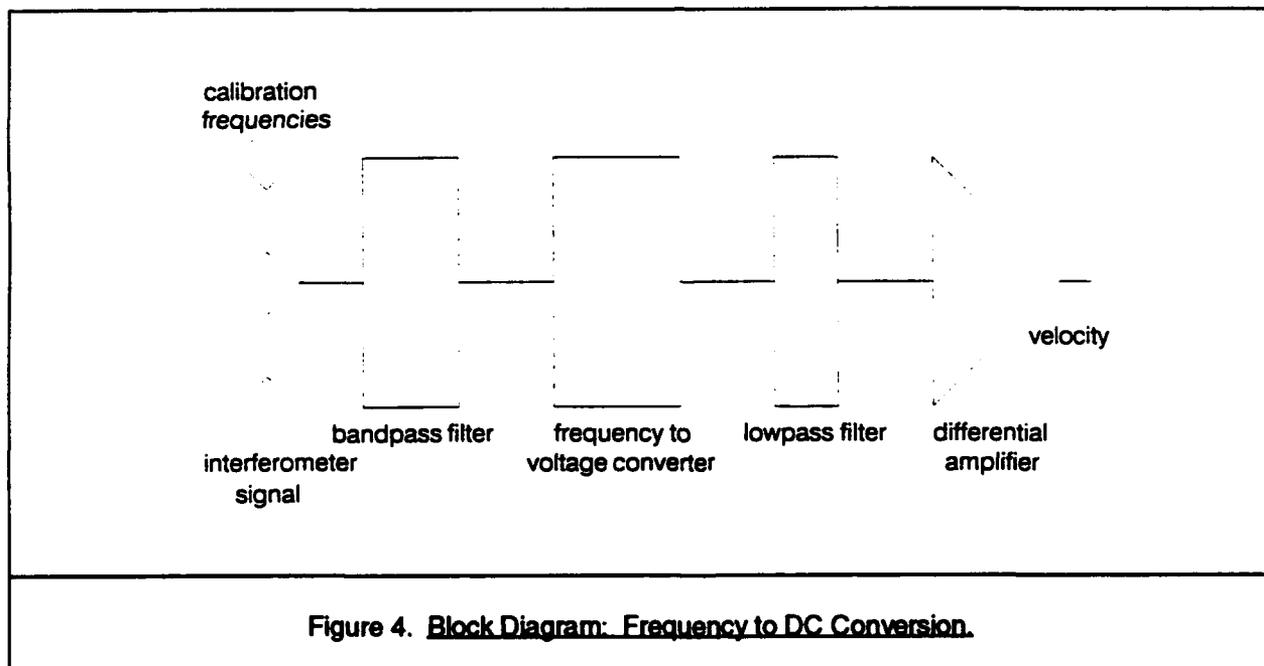
4. DISPLACEMENT TO VELOCITY CONVERSION

In many ballistic studies, the velocity of the projectile, rather than the displacement history of the projectile, is the parameter of interest. Several methods have been developed to extract detailed projectile in-bore motion information from the recorded interferometer signal. However, these methods involve complex and lengthy digital signal processing and are not amenable to real-time application (an example of this type of system is the TERMA BS310 Interferometer Reduction Package). Usually there is a considerable delay involved in having the interferometer records processed. Hence, there is a real need for a method capable of processing the analog interferometer signals in real time to obtain

the in-bore projectile velocity history. A method has been developed for the real-time measurement of projectile in-bore velocity and will be described in the following paragraphs.

Since each cycle of the interferometer record corresponds to a known displacement, the frequency of the sinusoidal interferometer record is directly proportional to the velocity of the projectile. A technique for the conversion of the interferometer signal to velocity involves a calibrated frequency-to-voltage conversion. The block diagram for the calibrated conversion of the analog interferometer record to in-bore projectile velocity is shown in Figure 4.

The interferometer signal is fed through a band-pass filter. The band-pass filter is not necessary for the conversion, but it is useful in removing extraneous noise such as 60 Hz and signals from leaves and other objects moving in the background. The output signal from the band-pass filter is then fed into a frequency-to-voltage converter (discriminator),



which produces a precision pulse of constant amplitude and duration for each positive going zero crossing of the input signal. One can also achieve good results by replacing the discriminator with a precision pulse generator. As with the discriminator, for each positive going zero crossing of the input waveform, a precision pulse of constant amplitude and duration is produced. With a constant frequency input signal, the output pulses will

be uniformly spaced and have a constant amplitude as shown in Figure 5. It is important that the user verify that a given input frequency produces a constant amplitude and duration pulse for each zero crossing over the range of intended use. These frequencies should simulate the interferometer signal that results as the projectile increases in velocity (resulting in an increase in frequency). The intent here is to demonstrate that the precision pulse generator is generating uniform pulses over the frequency range in which the system will be used. This can be accomplished by inputting constant frequencies from typically

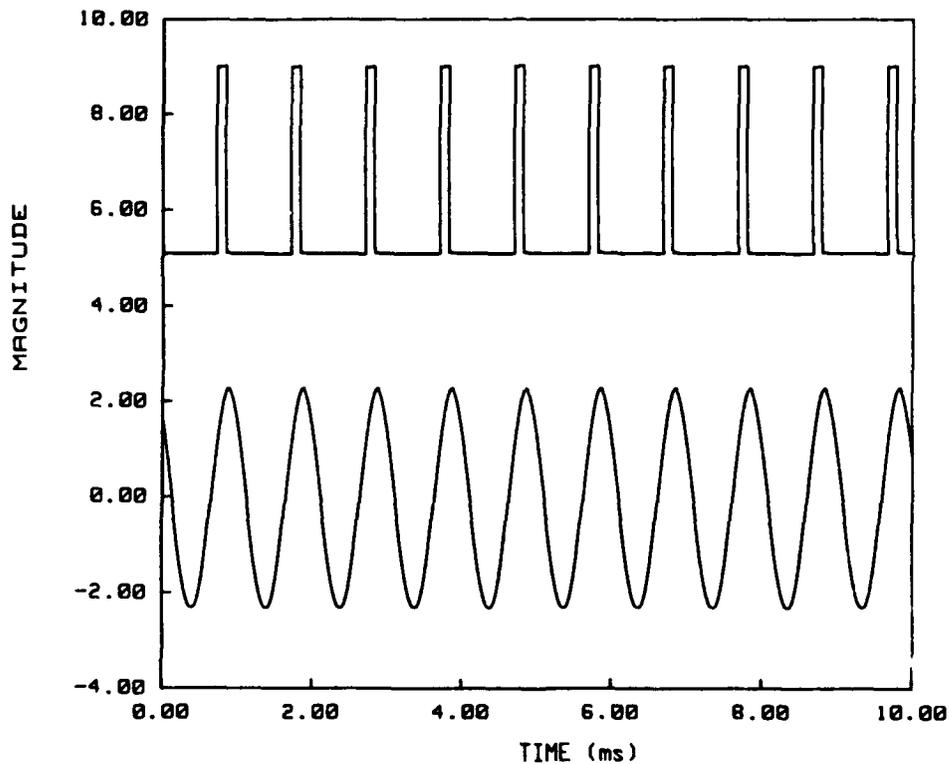


Figure 5. Constant Frequency Input and Corresponding Uniform Output Pulses From Precision Pulse Generator.

10 KHz to 300 KHz and observing the output of the pulse generator. The output voltage should maintain a constant amplitude and duration while maintaining the same frequency as the input frequency.

The pulse train in Figure 5 can be expanded into a Fourier series. The Fourier series expansion is a trigonometric series consisting of sine and cosine terms of the form (Lathi 1983):

$$f(t) = \frac{a_0}{2} + \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (a_n \cos n\omega t + b_n \sin n\omega t)$$

$$a_n = \frac{2}{\tau} \int_{-\tau/2}^{\tau/2} f(t) \cos n\omega t$$

$$b_n = \frac{2}{\tau} \int_{-\tau/2}^{\tau/2} f(t) \sin n\omega t$$

$$\frac{a_0}{2} = \frac{1}{\tau} \int_{-\tau/2}^{\tau/2} f(t) dt .$$

The $a_0/2$ term is the average value of $f(t)$ over one period. If the pulse train is fed into a low-pass filter, the average value can be shown to be proportional to the input frequency, i.e., the higher the input frequency, the closer the pulses, and the larger the average DC term. Figure 6 shows the input pulse train and the corresponding output from the low-pass filter.

From the preceding equation it can be seen that a problem exists at the start of motion. The " ω " in the $\sin(n\omega t)$ and $\cos(n\omega t)$ terms will be 2π times the frequency of the interferometer signal at any time, and of course, the interferometer signal frequency starts at zero. It is therefore impossible for the low-pass filter to separate the DC term from the terms containing " ω " at the start of projectile motion. This is not a serious problem except where a detailed description or evaluation of the start of projectile motion is required. Because of the rapid projectile acceleration, the frequency of the interferometer signal is, in general, greater than 5000 Hz after the first several cycles. By using a six pole, active,

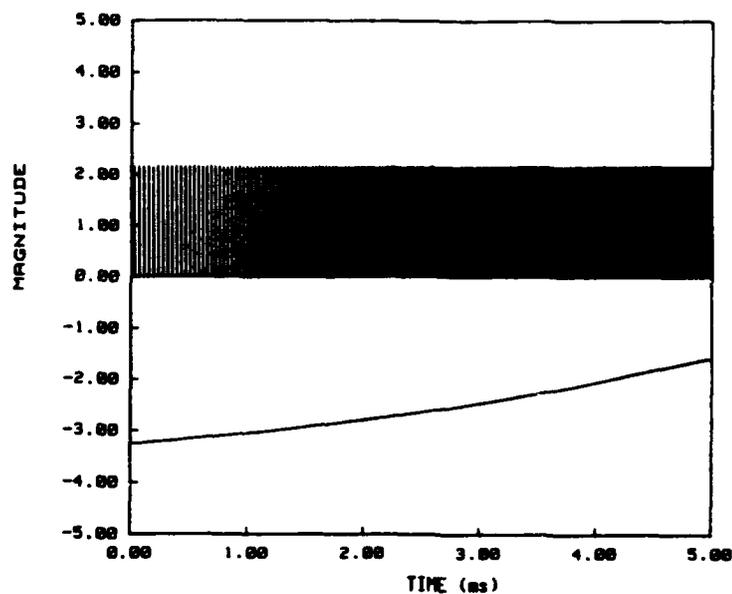


Figure 6. Constant Increasing Frequency Input Pulses and Corresponding Output From Low-pass Filter.

low-pass, electronic filter with a selectable cut-off frequency, the start of motion problem can be reduced to a few cycles of ripple on the first part of the velocity versus time record (A Precision Filter model number 616-01-LP1-G05 is a good example of this type of filter). It should be noted that the acceleration of the projectile is the controlling factor in setting the cut-off frequency of the low-pass filter. The cut-off frequency should be set as low as possible to separate the DC term from the " ω " terms and reduce the amount of ripple at the start of projectile motion. However, if it is set too low, the filter will remove the velocity changes, i.e. the acceleration of the projectile. This cutoff frequency can be experimentally set to optimize the operation. By inputting a frequency sweep into the system which approximates the acceleration of the projectile in the gun system being evaluated, one can adjust the low-pass filter cutoff frequency to minimize the ripple while maintaining the integrity of the signal during the time of maximum acceleration.

A differential DC amplifier is used for convenience to adjust the level and the polarity of the velocity signal for recording on magnetic tape and for on-line analog-to-digital conversion. Calibration is done by switching precise frequency levels into the input of the system. Five precision frequencies are switched into the system at 50 ms intervals to create a staircase output of the low-pass filter (recall that a constant frequency will give a constant DC voltage out of the low-pass filter). The interferometer signal is then switched

into the system using a relay. Both the calibration signal and the processed interferometer signal are fed to an analog-to-digital converter after which they are processed by a computer. By comparing the known calibration frequencies output from the above system with the output from the interferometer signal, the magnitude of the velocity at any point in time can be determined, except of course at the start of motion.

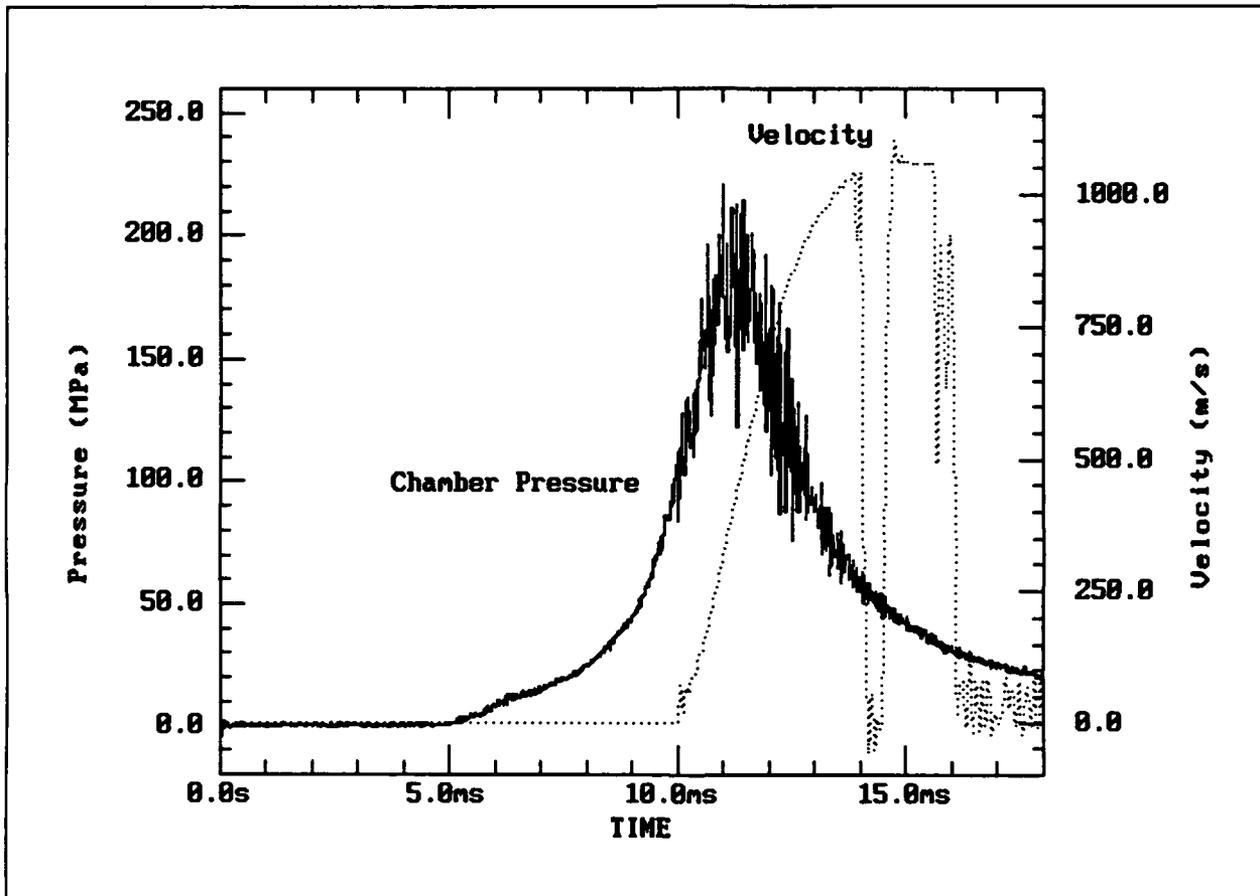
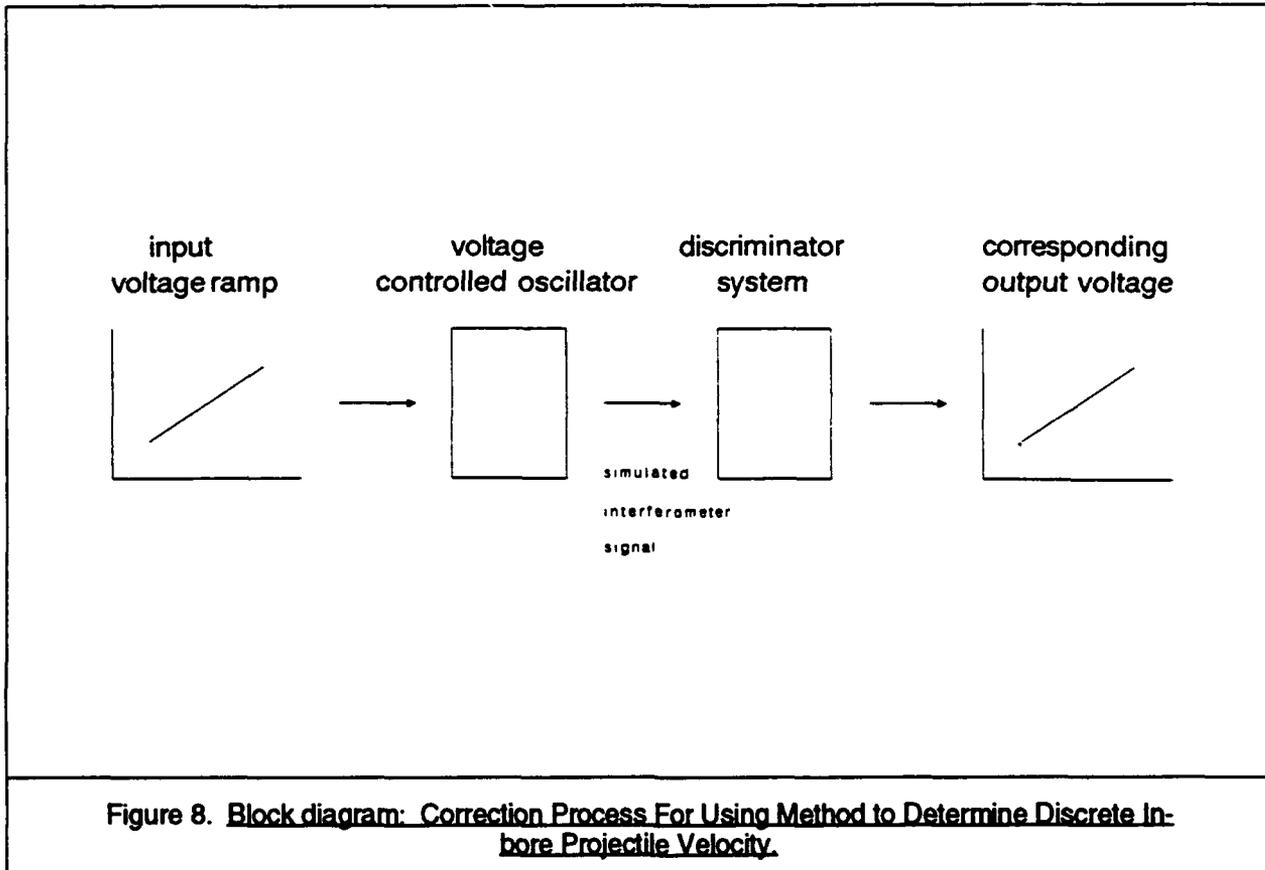


Figure 7. Real Time Velocity and Pressure Histories For a 30-mm Liquid Propellant Gun.

Figure 7 shows a plot of projectile velocity and chamber pressure for a 30-mm liquid propellant gun firing. The pressure is included to illustrate how the electronic conversion simplifies data processing by allowing the use of the same method for processing velocity-time records as for processing pressure-time records. At the start of motion a few cycles of ripple can be seen as previously described. The velocity then tracks well until the projectile exits the gun tube, at which time the combustion gases over run the projectile. This can be seen in Figure 7 where the signal drops out and then returns as the projectile

out runs the combustion gases. We define the level at which the velocity curve returns and then flattens out to be the muzzle velocity. Finally, as the projectile impacts the reflective medium, the signal is lost.



In practice, the velocity versus time curve serves as a very accurate method of determining muzzle velocity. However, there is an inherent time shift associated with the low-pass filter that will cause any correlation to time to be slightly incorrect unless the entire system is compensated. This time shift is proportional to the low-pass filter setting and is usually on the order of 100 micro-seconds, which in most cases can be ignored. However, for purposes of completeness, the authors recommend the compensation process shown in the block diagram in Figure 8.

The process of compensating the system is simple in theory. Using a voltage ramp and a voltage controlled oscillator, one can generate a frequency sweep from 10 KHz to 300 KHz that is proportional to the input voltage ramp. This frequency sweep will serve to simulate an interferometer signal, which in turn is fed into the displacement-to-velocity

conversion system outlined previously. The output of the low-pass filter will be a corresponding voltage ramp with the same slope as that used to generate the simulated interferometer signal. However, this voltage ramp will be shifted by a finite time, determined by the low-pass filter cut-off frequency. This time can be measured by using a dual channel storage oscilloscope. By varying the low-pass filter cut-off frequency, a corresponding shift in time between the input and output voltage ramps will be observed. This shift will be unique to the low-pass filter settings used in a particular system and therefore the calibration results will be different from system to system. By noting the time shift inherent at a particular cut-off frequency, one can adjust the time-base of the velocity versus time curve produced as the projectile traverses the gun tube. This will allow the displacement-to-velocity conversion system outlined previously to be used to more accurately determine a given projectile velocity at any point in time, except at the start of motion.

The error analysis presented earlier is directly applicable to the real-time displacement-to-velocity system described in this paper. In addition, the accuracy of the system is limited by the accuracy of the calibration steps used in the system. The calibration steps used in the system are accurate to less than 1%. Therefore the error in making the displacement-to-velocity conversion to measure muzzle velocity is less than 1 %.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The setup and theory of using a microwave interferometer to measure in-bore projectile displacement was presented. The major limitations of the measurement were discussed including the effects of pointed projectiles, ineffective obturation of the combustion gases, and gun system recoil. A method of processing a difference, or interferometer, signal in real time to obtain in-bore projectile velocity was outlined.

The resultant velocity profile serves as an accurate method of determining projectile muzzle velocity. However, it was noted that there is an inherent time shift associated with the low-pass filter in the displacement-to-velocity conversion. To account for this time shift, a compensation procedure was suggested which would allow the method to be used to determine projectile velocity at any point in time, except at projectile start of motion. In addition, an error analysis suggested that the error in determining muzzle velocity from a microwave interferometer record is less than .5 %. It was also suggested that the error of the real-time projectile displacement to projectile in-bore velocity was less than 1 %.

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