RESEARCH PROPOSAL

CAVITATION EROSION OF BLENDED STELLITE ALLOYS

by

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Submitted for the degree of
MSc. Mechanical Engineering

School of Engineering and Physical Sciences
Heriot-Watt University

April 2024

Abstract

Cavitation erosion is a complex phenomenon influenced by the strength properties of cavitating bubbles and material resistance, leading to performance degradation through material loss. This research endeavors to evaluate the resistance of blended stellite alloys to cavitation erosion. Simulation of cavitation phenomena will be achieved using ultrasonic vibrating probes positioned consistently from the material. The study will investigate the synergistic interplay between cavitation and corrosion erosion through in-situ electrochemical measurements. Experimental procedures will involve an ultrasonic vibratory horn operating at a fixed frequency of 20 kHz, with adjustable peak-to-peak amplitude. Microstructural characterization of cavitated sample surfaces and underlying cross-sections affected by cavitation will be conducted using scanning electron microscopy.

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Cavitation erosion occurs when vapor bubbles form and collapse within a fluid due to pressure reaching the vapor pressure threshold [1–3]. The implosion emits heat [4], shockwaves [5], and microjets [6] that damage adjacent solid surfaces, leading to material removal due to cumulative cavitation events [7, 8]. The resulting stress levels, as seen in Figure 1, can exceed material thresholds, causing surface damage and system degradation [9]. Understanding material response to cavitation stresses is crucial for selecting resistant materials and minimizing maintenance costs.

Stellites are cobalt-chromium alloys that are typically used for surfaces in lubrication-starved, high temperature or corrosive environments [10–14], such as in the nuclear industry [15–17], oil & gas [18, 19], marine [20], power generation [21], and aerospace industries [22]. The wear resistance of different stellite alloys manufactured by casting, forging, laser cladding, and hot isostatic pressing (HIP) has been investigated extensively, [12, 13, 23–31].

The cavitation erosion of stellites has been investigated in experimental studies [21, 32–50], along with investigations into cobalt-based alloys [51–61].

Ahmed et al. investigate the impact of HIP'ing on stellite alloys, finding superior impact and fatigue resistance compared to cast alloys [**Ahmedd2021**, 63–67]. They also explored blended alloys formed by consolidating two stellite powders, resulting in unique microstructures influenced by the different diffusion rates of added ele-

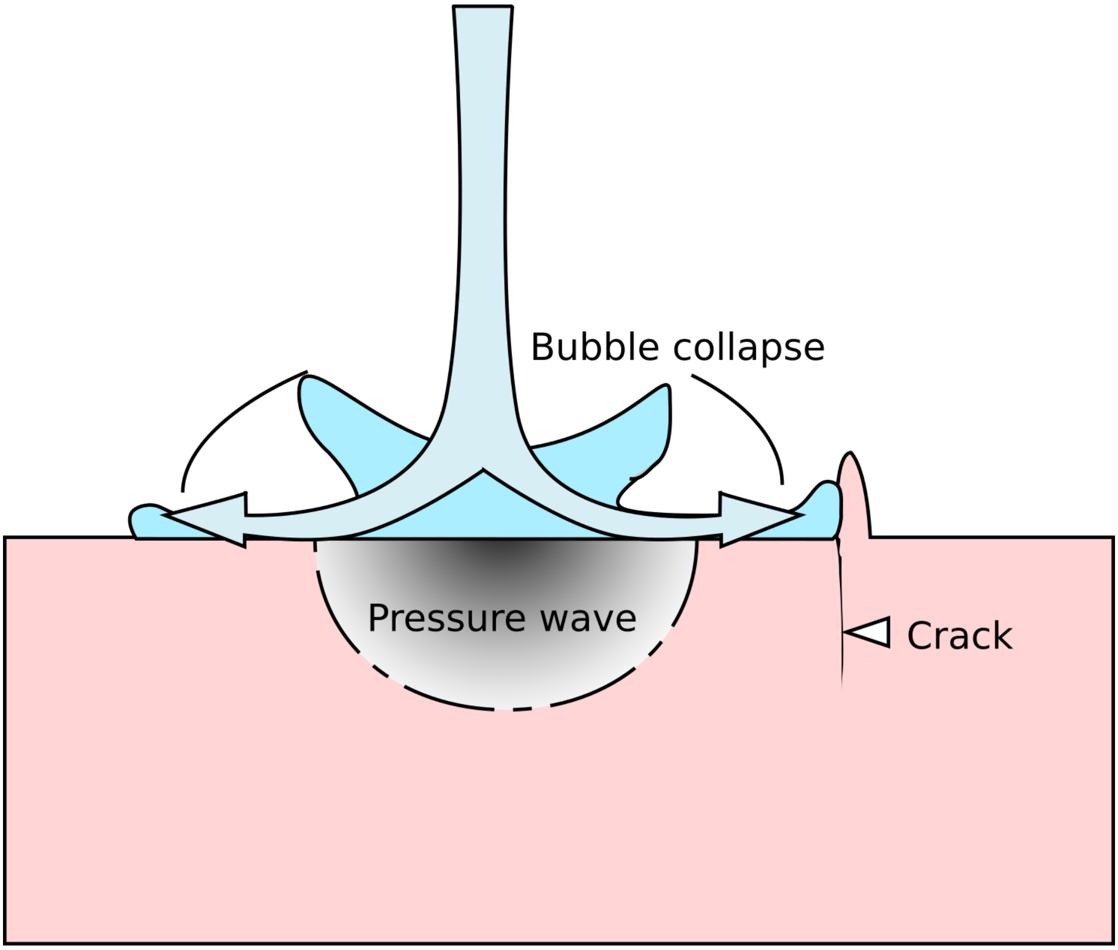

Figure 1.1: Damage mechanism of cavitation

ments. Depending on the composition of the stellite powders used, the blended alloys could possess uniform microstructure or regions that are similar to the constituent powders [11, 62]. This is due to the different diffusion rates of the added elements - carbon diffuses through the blended alloys while tungsten cannot diffuse due to its high atomic radius [11, 62].

Given the detrimental influence of voids and defects on cavitation erosion, the lack of academic investigation into cavitation erosion on HIP (Hot Isostatic Pressing) stellite alloys, underscores the need for further exploration. Moreover, the complexity introduced by blended stellite alloys in the context of cavitation erosion in corrosive environments adds another layer of intrigue to this research endeavor. By analyzing the interactions between alloy composition, microstructure, and cavitation erosion behavior, this thesis aims to fill a critical gap in the current understanding of material performance under cavitation erosion conditions.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

Cavitation erosion impacts various industrial components, lowering their service life and increasing overall costs. In order to minimize damage & losses due to cavitation, the mechanisms by which materials undergo cavitation erosion need to be understood. This work aims at identifying the most relevant factors to the cavitation erosion of base and blended stellite alloys, with a focus on how composition and microstructure affect cavitation resistance. The objectives of this work are to:

1. **Design and develop** an experimental rig capable of accurately simulating cavitation erosion conditions in distilled water & artificial seawater and achieving measurable & replicable erosion rates, **by end of May**.
2. **Quantify** cavitation erosion resistance of stellite materials in distilled water and artificial seawater by end of June
3. **Investigate** the morphology, microstructure, chemical composition, and surface characteristics of eroded stellite samples **by end of July**.
    (a) **Acquire** Optical Microscopy images of eroded stellite samples at different stages of testing, in order to track changes of overall morphology of eroded surface.
    (b) **Acquire** Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) images of eroded stellite samples to analyze the microstructural changes and phase composition resulting from cavitation erosion
    (c) **Acquire** Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectrometry (EDS) images and scans to analyze the elemental composition of specific regions on the eroded stellite samples (elemental composition of matrix, carbides, and interfaces)
4. **Develop** mathematical models for cavitation erosion of stellite alloys **by end of July**
    (a) **Investigate** the relationship between composition and previously reported structure-property relationships to cavitation erosion rates.

   (b) **Assess** the applicability of parameter-models of cavitation erosion to experimental data of the cumulative mass loss of stellites.

5. **Understand** the cavitation mechanism in stellite alloys and describe a phenomological model of CE in stellite alloys and provide actionable recommendations for enhancing cavitation resistance in stellite alloys

Finite element simulations (FEA) and other numerical simulation techniques are outside the the scope of this thesis.

1.2 Resources

The designed rig will require the use of the following equipment

- Q500 Sonicator (existing)
- Vacuum Pump and Dessicator (purchased)
- Chilled Water Supply (existing)
- Coiled heat exchanger (purchased)
- Air Compressor (existing)

This work will require access to the following university laboratories.

- Energy Laboratory

  Location of relevant existing equipment (sonotrode, microscope, precision balance). There are two computers in the Energy Lab, the first to control the microscope and to handle image processing through ImageJ, and second for general purpose computing. The second computer has an automated backup, in addition to version control on all data stored.

- Chemical Laboratory

  Acetone is stored in Flammable Liquid Storage Cabinet in Chemical Lab, with purchase of more acetone available through vendors registered with Procurement. Distilled water is provided by Type 1 water purification system in the Chemical Laboratory.

- Fabrication & Automotive Laboratory

  Access to tools for modification of equipment.

- Electronics Laboratory

  Access to soldering equipment for work on unpowered equipment.

In addition to the above, the following items are required:

- Specimens of Blended Stellite Alloys Samples are provided by Dr Rehan Ahmed.
- Material characterization equipment Access to SEM, EDS, and XRD facilities through an MoU w/ University of Sharjah,

1.3 Risks

The primary concern for this project revolves around time constraints and potential delays that were not adequately accounted for during the initial project planning phase.

1.3.1 Experimental setup complexity risks

Experimental setup could pose unexpected issues due to lack of planning. In order to mitigate the risk of unexpected design changes, the following strategies are to be employed

- Detailed Planning and Design in CAD

  The rig is to be designed in CAD to ensure all subsystems meet spatial, power, and I/O requirements.
- Expert Consultation & Review

  The rig design is to be reviewed by supervisor and other expereinced researchers & engineers. Feedback is to be recorded and designed altered to alleviate concerns. Identified people for review are Dr Rehan Ahmed, Dr Mohammed Al-Musleh, Muhsin Aykapaddatu
- Functionality/performance is not as expected or to specification

  Pilot testing of the rig to ASTM G32 standards using known materials (e.g., 316L stainless steel) will verify functionality and performance, comparing results with existing data.
- Documenting Procedures and Troubleshooting Protocols

  Detailed documentation of components and development of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) aligned with ASTM G32 standards will be maintained. Troubleshooting protocols will be established for unforeseen issues.
- Modular Design & Redundancies

  The rig will feature a modular design for easy component adjustment. Spare parts will be readily available for quick replacement or repair, minimizing downtime.

1.3.2 Health & Safety risks

- Noise exposure

  The sonotrode emits high frequency noise that is

- Chemical Hazards

1.4 Beneficiaries & Stakeholders

Industry stakeholders, including manufacturers and technology providers, are likely to benefit from improved understanding of cavitation erosion in stellite alloys, enabling the development of more durable materials for applications in harsh environments, such as hydroelectric power plants [47], Francis turbines [68], nuclear power plant valves [17, 69], condensate and boiler feedwater pumps [70], marine propellers [71], liquid-lubricated journal bearings [72], pipline reducers [73–75].

The project supervisor and academic faculty represent the primary stakeholders, whose critique will be necessary for attaining project & academic objectives. Apart from serving as mentor, the project supervisor has provided rare specimens and leveraged inter-university connections to access material characterization facilities, enhancing the project's resources and capabilities. Other stakeholders are:

- Peer Researchers: offer peer review and collaboration, in addition to being users of similar equipment. Undergraduate students are unlikely to be present during project duration, although they are likely to be end users of equipment after project close.

- Research Community contribute to understanding of cavitation erosion and benefit from data : Project outcomes generate data and contribute to understanding of cavitation erosion. Researchers and industrial partners

- Lab Manager: In addition to ensuring compliance with health and safety requirements, the lab manager is a doctoral student working on their research rig; their advice will be helpful.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Cavitation erosion is a complex phenomenon that results from hydrodynamic elements and material characteristics [7]. When components are exposed to sustained cavitation erosion, the component surface is degraded and material is progressively lost.

From a hydrodynamic standpoint, cavitation erosion results from the formation of and subsequent collapse of vapor bubbles within a fluid medium, due to the local pressure reaching the saturated vapor pressure (due to pressure decrease (cavitation) or temperature increase (boiling)). When these bubbles implode, they emit heat, shockwaves, and high-speed microjets that can impact adjacent solid surfaces, leading to damage to the surface and removal of material due to the accumulation of damage following numerous cavitation events [76–78]. The required pressure drop required by cavitation could be provided by the propagation of ultrasonic acoustic waves and hydrodynamic pressure drops, such as constrictions or the rotational dynamics of turbomachinery [79]. Impurities in the fluid, such as solid particles and nanobubbles with a radius of 500nm can significantly reduce the cavitation threshold leading to increased cavitation intensity [80]. When these bubbles collapse near walls, the concentration of energy on very small areas of the wall result in high stress levels on the wall [81].

The resultant stress levels, which range from 100 - 1000 MPa, can surpass material resistance thresholds, including yield strength, ultimate strength, or fatigue limit, leading to material removal from the surface and subsequent degradation of industrial systems [76–78]. The high strain rate in cavitation erosion makes it rather comparable to explosions or projectile impacts, albeit with very limited volume of deformation and repeated impact loads [82–87]. The plastic deformation results in progressive hardening, crack propagation, and local fracture and removal of material, with the damage being a function of intensity and frequency of vapor bubble collapse [88–90]. The selection of more resistent materials requires investigation of material response to cavitation stresses, with the mechanism of erosion being of particular interest [91–93]. The resulting reduction of performance & service life and the increased maintenance and repair costs motivate research into understanding how materials respond to the impact of a cavitating material.

2.1 Measuring cavitation erosion through ASTM G32

The ASTM G32 standard defines the study of cavitation performance of materials by placing an ultrasonic sonotrode above a stationary specimen, forming a thin liquid layer between the two solid walls, as seen in Figure 2.1. The sonotrode horn emits an acoustic wave into the fluid and causes cavitation when the pressure amplitude is sufficiently high. Due to the reflection and superposition of ultrasound in the thin liquid layer, the intensity of cavitating bubbles is increased, leading to accelerated cavitation erosion [80, 94, 95].

2.1.1 Effect of distance between sonotrode and specimen

Endo et al [96] found that the extent of damage depends upon the thickness of the thin liquid layer, Kikuchi et al [97] find that the extent of damage is a function of the reciprocal of the thickness of the liquid layer. For thicknesses $h < 0.5mm$, numerous bubbles coalese into several large bubble clusters in contact with the horn tip and the staionary specimen, while for thicknesses $h > 0.5mm$, the numerous bubbles

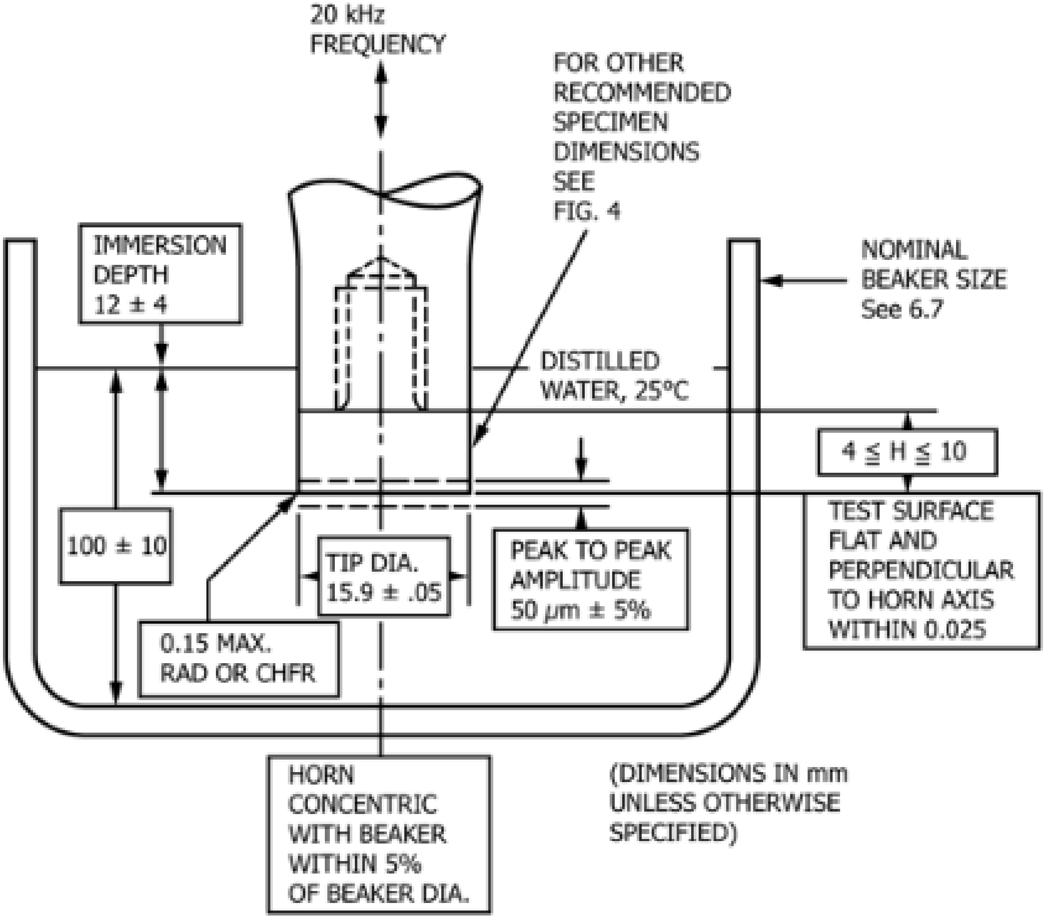

Figure 2.1: Important parameters of experimental apparatus from ASTM G32. From [94]

produced are isolated [98–100].

2.1.2 Effect of liquid temperature

The test water temperature affects the degree of cavitation erosion [101, 102], with mass loss rate initially increasing with increase in temperature, peaking at an optimum temperature T_m, then decreasing with further increase in temperature [103], with bulk liquid temperatures above 50 C not altering erosion rate significantly [101, 104]. However, it must be noted that the temperature of the liquid film between the ultrasonic tip and sample rises rapidly, regardless of the bulk liquid temperature [96, 99], with maximum erosion rates observed with film temperatures at temperatures 30-35 C [101, 105].

2.2 Stellite

Stellite alloys belong to the cobalt-chromium family, with the addition of tungsten or molybdenum as the main alloying elements. The matrix in stellite alloys consist of cobalt (Co) with solid-solution strengthening of a substantial amount of chromium (Cr) and tungsten(W)/moblybdenum(Mo), resulting in high hardness & strength at high temperature, with carbide precipitations (Co, Cr, W, and/or Mo carbides) adding strength and wear resistance [26, 27, 62, 106–108]. Stellites are typically used for wear-resistant surfaces in lubrication-starved, high temperature or corrosive environments [10–14], such as in the nuclear industry [15–17], oil & gas [18, 19], marine [20], power generation [21], and aerospace industries [22].

The wear resistance of different stellite alloys manufactured by casting, forging, laser cladding, and hot isostatic pressing (HIP) has been investigated extensively, [12, 13, 23–31]. Hot Isostatic Pressing (HIP) consolidation of Stellite alloys offers significant technological advantages for components operating in aggressive wear environments [12, 22, 64, 66]. Yu et al [30, 67] note that HIP consolidation results in superior impact and fatigue resistance over cast alloys. The cavitation erosion of stellites has been investigated in experimental studies, as seen in Table 2.1, [21, 32–50], along with investigations into cobalt-based alloys [51–61]. However the cavitation erosion mechanism has not been fully established, particularly with the effect of microstructure due to different fabrication techniques, as seen in Figure 2.2. In addition to the energy absorbing effect of phase transformation of the cobalt matrix [61], Heathcock et al [109] find that finer carbide structure leads to increased cavitation erosion resistance, an observation ratified by Garzon et al [**Garzon2005145**]. Cavitation erosion of stellite coatings is improved in seawater, when compared to distilled water [52], likely due to the protective effect of chromium oxides inhibiting formation of erosion pits [53].

Corrosion studies conducted on stellites find high corrosion resistance. The matrix is preferentially attacked, with the dissolution of Co into Co^{2+}, while a surface layer comprised of chromium-rich oxides (Cr2O3 & Cr(OH)3) prevents further corrosion

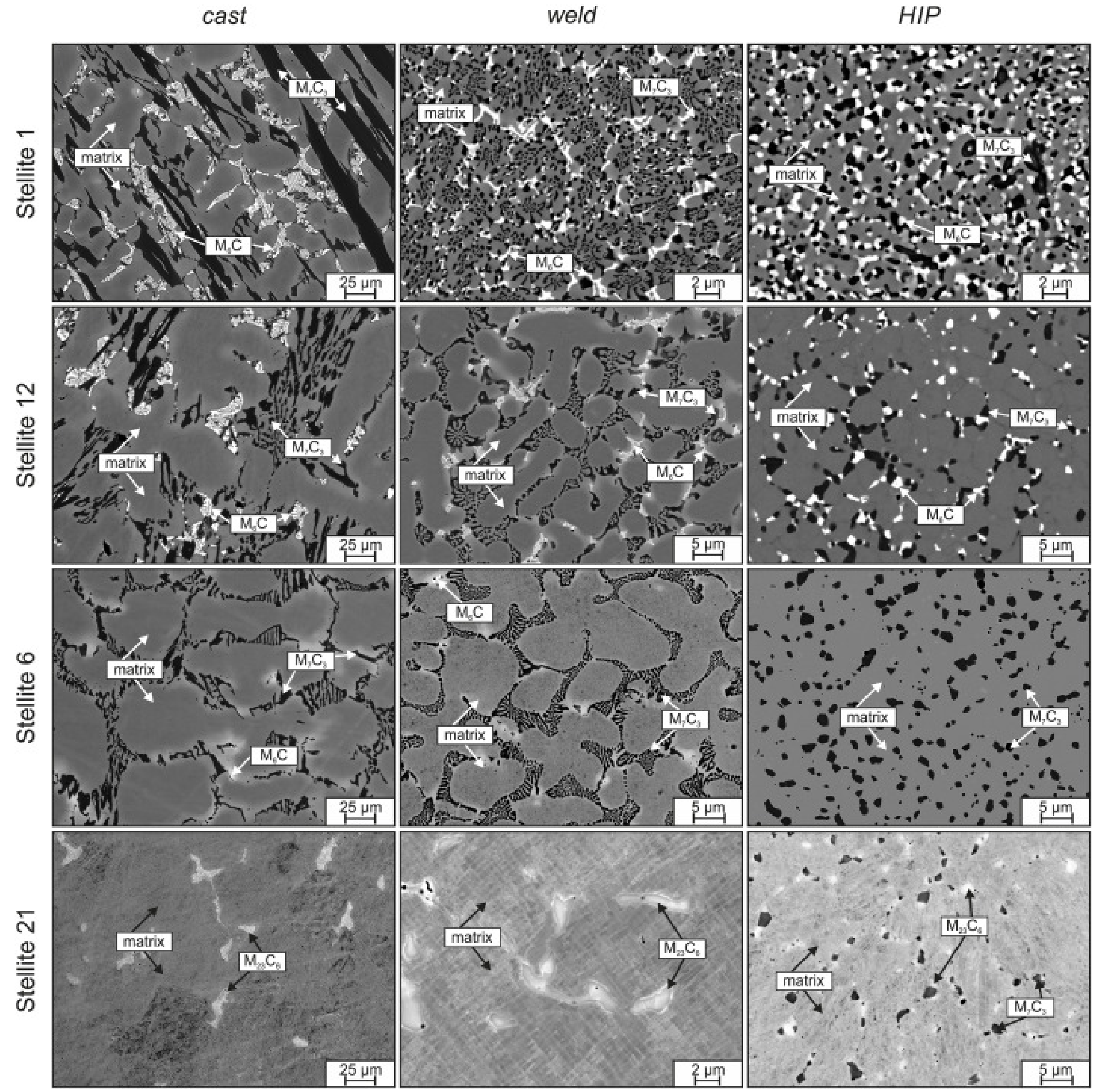

Figure 2.2: Microstructure of Stellite alloys 1, 12, 6, & 21 due to casting, welding, and HIP'ing. From [31].

in chloride-rich environments. Zhang et al find that stellite alloys with higher carbon content have less corrosion resistance [10]. Malayoglu et al find improved erosion and corrosion resistance of HIP'ed Stellite 6 over cast Stellite 6, due to lessened removal of Co-rich matrix in HIP'ed material. [110]. Mohamed et al report similar improved performance of HIP'ed Stellite 6 and attribute it to the fine grain size of carbides in HIP'ed materials [111].

2.2.1 Matrix phase

Cobalt and Co-Cr alloys undergo thermally induced phase transformation from the high temperature face-centered cubic (fcc) γ phase to low temperature hexagonal

Table 2.1: Operating parameters used in ASTM G32 tests on Stellite specimens

			Peak to Peak Amplitude (µm)	Water Temperature (°C)	Standoff Distance (mm)	Test Duration (hr)	Total Duration (hr)	Terminal Erosion Rate for Eroded Area 199 mm² (mg h⁻¹)	References
Indirect	**Water**	HIP'ed Stellite 6	50	-	0.5	1.5	24	2.09	[33]
		$5 \times 10^{16} \frac{Mn^+}{cm^2}$ HIP'ed Stellite 6	50	-	0.5	1.5	24	2.07	[33]
		$10 \times 10^{16} \frac{Mn^+}{cm^2}$ HIP'ed Stellite 6	50	-	0.5	1.5	24	1.88	[33]
Direct	**Water**	LC Stellite 6	50	25	-	1	14	2.7	[36]
		SLD Stellite 6	50	25	-	1	14	0.77	[36]
		HVOF Stellite 21	25	25	-	0.5	8	-	[35]
	3.5 wt% NaCl	Stellite 728	50	25	-	5	50	1.012	[32]
		Stellite 6	50	25	-	5	50	2.841	[32]
		Stellite 6B	50	25	-	5	50	2.018	[32]
		HVOF Stellite 21	25	25	-	0.5	8	-	[35]
		LC Stellite 6	50	25	-	1	14	0.044	[38]
		SLD-1.0kW Stellite 6	50	25	-	1	14	0.017	[38]
		SLD-1.0kW Stellite 6	50	25	-	1	14	0.017	[38]

close-packed (hcp) ϵ phase at 700 K and strain induced fcc-hcp transition through maretensitic-type mechanism (partial movement of dislocations) [32, 112]. At ambient conditions, the metastable FCC retained phase in stellites can be transformed into HCP phase by mechanical loading, although any HCP phase is completely transformed into a FCC phase between 673 K and 743 K [35, 113]; the metastable fcc cobalt phase in stellite alloys [36, 114] absorbs a large part of imparted energy under the mechanical loading of cavitation erosion. The fcc to hcp transition is related to the very low stacking fault energy of the fcc structure (7 mJ/m2) [33, 115, 116].

Solid-solution strengthening leads to increase of the fcc cobalt matrix strength (due to distortion of the atomic lattice with the addition of elements of different atomic radii), and decrease of low stacking fault energy [115] due to the adjusted electronic structure of the metallic lattice. Dislocation motion in stellites is discouraged by solute atoms of Mo and W, due to the large atomic sizes. Given that dislocation cross slip is the main deformation mode in imperfect crystals at elevated temperature, as dislocation slip is a diffusion process that is enhanced at high temperature, this leads to high temperature stability [117]. In addition, nickel (Ni), iron (Fe), and carbon (C) stabilize the fcc structure of cobalt (a = 0.35 nm), while chromium (Cr) and tungsten (W), stabilize the hcp structure (a = 0.25 nm and c = 0.41 nm) [115, 118].

2.2.2 Carbide phase

The amount and types of carbides dispersed in the stellite matrix are primarily determined by the carbon content, with higher carbon content encouraging carbides with higher C/M ratios, while the size of carbides is determined by the cooling rate [27, 29]. Carbon content can be used to distinguish between different stellite alloys: high-carbon stellites designed for high wear resistance, abrasion, & severe galling, medium-carbon (0.5 - 1.6% wt) stellites used for high temperature service, and low-carbon (¡0.5% wt) stellites used primarily for corrosion resistance, cavitation, & sliding wear [37, 119]. Low-carbon stellites depend primarily of solid-solution strengthening for their mechanical properties. As the carbon content increases, the W/Mo content is usually also increased to prevent depletion of Cr from matrix solid solution strengthening [10, 111]. Chromium is the predominant carbide former, with M7C3 and M23C6 phases, in addition to providing corrosion resistance and strength to the stellite matrix [43–45]. Difference between the M7C3 and M23C6 phases is not readily visible under SEM. In tungsten-containing alloys, carbides of type M7C3 and M6C are formed in addition to the matrix. Ahmed et al report on the identification of intermetallic Co3W and Co7W6 phases through XRD, although these phases are not identified in SEM observations [31, 120, 121].

2.2.3 Blended Stellite Alloys

Ahmed et al investigate the influence of the HIP'ing process on stellites [62–67], and conclude that HIP consolidation of Stellite alloys offers significant technological advantages for components operating in aggressive wear environments due to superior impact and fatigue resistance over cast alloys [12, 22, 64, 66]. In order to achieve unique microstructures from existing stellite alloys, Ahmed et al investigate the performance of blended alloys [11, 62], which are formed through the consolidation of a mixture of two stellite powders.

A blended stellite alloy is formed by hot isostatic pressing of a mixture of two stellite powders. The powders are created through gas atomization, in which a stream of liquid stellite alloy is disrupted and atomized into tiny molten droplets by a high-pressure inert gas flow [11, 62, 122, 123]. The free-falling molten droplets rapidly solidify into spherical particles before being collected, forming high quality stellite powders with controllable size. The rapid cooling of the powder during atomization leads to reduced precipitation of carbides and supersaturation of the metallic matrix with other elements, as seen in the reduced proportion of carbide phases detected in the XRD performed on powders, compared to XRD of HIP'd samples. The mixing of powders is conducted in a powder hopper that ensures uniform distribution of powder mixtures [11, 62]. The HIP treatment was conducted at a temperature of 1200 C and a pressure of 100 MPa for a duration of 4 hours, resulting in full dense blended stellite alloys [124–126]. During the HIP'ing process, carbides are precipitated, in addition to reduction of supersaturation of the matrix [127, 128]. Depending on the composition of the stellite powders used, the blended alloys could possess uniform microstructure or regions that are similar to the constituent powders. This is due to the different diffusion rates of the added elements - carbon diffuses through the blended alloys while tungsten cannot diffuse due to its high atomic radius [11, 62, 129, 130].

In summary, the literature review underscores the necessity for additional academic inquiry into the cavitation erosion resistance of HIP'ed stellite alloys, particularly focusing on the influence of composition on microstructure and cavitation erosion behavior. This thesis endeavors to address this gap in knowledge by conducting a comprehensive investigation.

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