

Aerodynamic Reconstruction Applied to Parachute Test Vehicle Flight Data Analysis

Leonard D. Cassady* and Eric S. Ray†
Jacobs Engineering, Houston, TX, 77058, USA

and Tuan H. Truong‡
NASA-JSC, Houston, TX, 77058, USA

The aerodynamics, both static and dynamic, of a test vehicle are critical to determining the performance of the parachute cluster in a drop test and for conducting a successful test. The Capsule Parachute Assembly System (CPAS) project is conducting tests of NASA's Orion Multi-Purpose Crew Vehicle (MPCV) parachutes at the Army Yuma Proving Ground utilizing the Parachute Test Vehicle (PTV). The PTV shape is based on the MPCV, but the height has been reduced in order to fit within the C-17 aircraft for extraction. Therefore, the aerodynamics of the PTV are similar, but not the same as, the MPCV. A small series of wind tunnel tests and computation fluid dynamics cases were run to modify the MPCV aerodynamic database for the PTV, but aerodynamic reconstruction of the flights has proven an effective source for further improvements to the database. The acceleration and rotational rates measured during free flight, before parachute inflation but during deployment, were used to confirm vehicle static aerodynamics. A multibody simulation is utilized to reconstruct the parachute portions of the flight. Aerodynamic or parachute parameters are adjusted in the simulation until the prediction reasonably matches the flight trajectory. Knowledge of the static aerodynamics is critical in the CPAS project because the parachute riser load measurements are scaled based on forebody drag. PTV dynamic damping is critical because the vehicle has no reaction control system to maintain attitude - the vehicle dynamics must be understood and modeled correctly before flight. It will be shown here that aerodynamic reconstruction has successfully contributed to the CPAS project.

I. Introduction

When testing parachutes in the wake of a blunt body, such as a capsule, it can be beneficial to analyze the aerodynamic characteristics of the forebody to understand its effects on parachute performance and the overall stability of the test configuration. In addition, flight test programs might not have a complete set of aerodynamics before starting and it could become necessary to use the flights themselves to confirm or improve the aerodynamic databases. Equipping the test vehicle with an IMU and GPS system, coupled with measurements of atmospheric winds and pressure, gives quantitative information on which to base dynamic pressure and angle of attack. Aerodynamic forces and moments calculated from measured acceleration and body rotational rates can be compared to databases and possibly improve the nominal or uncertainties. Multibody simulations can reconstruct longer periods of flight to determine dynamic aero and parachute performance. The stability of the test article is very important and using multibody simulations allowed the Capsule Parachute Assembly System (CPAS) team to develop an updated aerodynamic stability database that affected future test architectures.

Here we demonstrate that aerodynamic reconstruction using two different tools have been used to improve the PTV aerodynamic database. During the short durations of free flight the static aerodynamics are

*Aerodynamics and Parachute Engineer, Applied Aeroscience and CFD Branch, and AIAA Member.

†Parachute Analysis Engineer, Aeroscience and Flight Dynamics, 2224 Bay Area Blvd, Houston, TX, and AIAA Member

‡Aerodynamics Engineer & MPCV Aerosciences Aero Team Lead, Applied Aeroscience and CFD Branch, and AIAA Member.

extracted from the measurements. The free flight aerodynamics are compared to the database. The longer periods of flight under the Drogue parachutes are reconstructed using FAST, a multibody simulation tool whose name is not an acronym. The simulation inputs are adjusted until the primary metrics (altitude, dynamic pressure, and square root of the summation of the squares of pitch and yaw rates (RSS)) reasonably match throughout the segment. Parachute drag is a large driver of vehicle motion, so the average drag coefficient (i.e. C_D is presently not modeled as a function of time or PTV attitude) is adjusted to match the dynamic pressure and descent rate. The dynamics of the PTV have proven to be different from the original database. The $C_m q$ curve was adjusted as a function of angle of attack and Mach number to match the time history of flight data.

We describe the CPAS program that is utilizing aerodynamic reconstruction in section II. Section III describes how static aerodynamics are extracted from free flight and compared with the reference database. Section IV describes how multibody simulations are used to reconstruct test flights and modifications to parachute performance and vehicle aerodynamics are made.

II. CPAS Program Description

NASA is developing the Orion MPCV to return crew from missions as far ranging as Lunar orbit to an ocean landing. The MPCV is a capsule similar to the Apollo capsule, but with a 30% larger diameter and is almost twice as massive. Although the capsule design is being led by Lockheed, the parachute system is government furnished equipment. NASA is leading the CPAS project, with the help of contractors and vendors, to design, develop, test, and qualify the parachute system. The CPAS project is approximately half way through the engineering development unit (EDU) tests of the parachute clusters configured closely to the MPCV design.^{1,2}



Figure 1. Photograph of the PTV mounted on CPSS.

The MPCV is designed to enter the atmosphere and control attitude using reaction control jets as the capsule slows due to aerodynamic drag to mid-subsonic speeds. Two 23 foot diameter variable porosity conical ribbon Drogue parachutes are deployed to further slow the capsule and to stabilize the vehicle

attitude in the denser atmosphere at lower altitudes. Each Drogue has two reefed stages before reaching full open to control inflation loads. Below a preset altitude, the guidance algorithm cuts away the Drogues at a time when the pitch and yaw rates are near minimum to reduce the possibility that the vehicle could flip as the Main parachutes deploy. The three main parachutes are independently deployed by three mortar deployed pilot parachutes. The pilot parachute mortars are fired simultaneously with the Drogue riser cut. The Main parachutes are 116 foot ring sail parachutes - also with two reefed stages - designed so that the vehicle contacts the water at an acceptable velocity should one Main parachute fail.

The CPAS EDU tests use two different platforms to test with: a large dart designated the Parachute Compartment Development Test Vehicle (PCDTV) and the Parachute Test Vehicle (PTV). The PCDTV is a low-drag dart extracted from a C-130 for testing the parachute cluster at high velocity and dynamic pressure. The PTV is capsule-shaped to test the wake effects on the cluster performance. It is expected that the wake will significantly reduce the performance of the Drogue parachutes. One of the primary functions of the Drogue chute is to stabilize the capsule during descent. Since the PTV is about 20 inches shorter than the MPCV the moment arm from the center of gravity to the riser fair lead is shorter. Damping due to Drogue parachutes has been shown to be a function of that moment arm squared.³ The Drogue parachutes have about half the damping on the PTV as compared to the MPCV, making the PTV much less stable under the Drogues than the MPCV. The PTV is mated to a modified extraction pallet (Cradle and Platform Separation System or CPSS) used with the C-17. Extraction occurs at 25,000 feet, but for future tests that altitude will increase to 35,000 feet. The PTV is released from the pallet a few seconds after extraction. Parachutes, called Programmers, are static line deployed by the pallet and are attached to the PTV with a four point harness. The harness provides a much more effective damping of vehicle motion than a single point attachment. The Programmers with the four point attachment are utilized to set the attitude and the dynamic pressure of the PTV at Drogue deployment.



Figure 2. Photograph of the PTV separating from the CPSS.

The aerodynamic forces on the falling capsule can be determined from the acceleration measurements on board the PTV. The PTV contains an IMU / GPS system that measures and records position, velocity, acceleration, and body angular rates. The NovAtel SPAN-SE (Synchronized Position Attitude & Navigation) is an integrated GPS/IMU system that measures test vehicle position, velocity, and attitude. A Kalman filter in the post-processing software is used to continue position and velocity estimation during any GPS dropout and it smooths through the GPS position update rate of 20 Hz. The attitude sensors use laser ring gyros which are not susceptible to magnetic interference of the metallic aircraft and payload, which is a common

problem with other attitude sensors. The SPAN-SE data are transferred from the IMU location to the CG with a kinematic correction. Also, inertial velocity is adjusted to wind relative velocity using windpack data recorded shortly after the test vehicle is dropped. The wind speed and direction were measured the day of the test, roughly 20 minutes afterward and a mile a way. The atmospheric temperature and pressure are measured using weather balloons within approximately an hour (before and after) of conducting the test. The simulations use the winds and atmospheric density as inputs as a function of altitude.

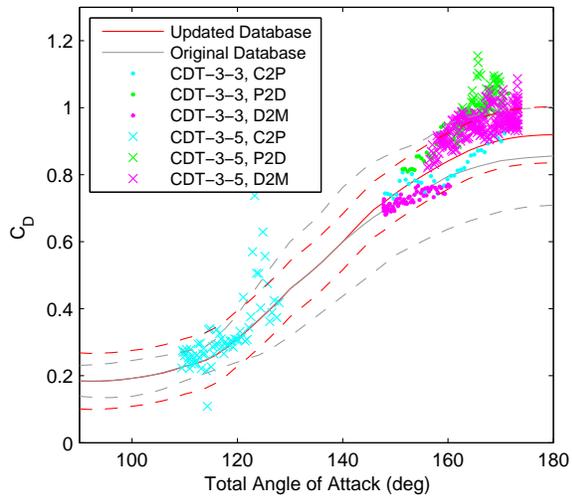
III. Static Aerodynamics

PTV aerodynamic drag is critical for determining parachute performance in the CPAS program. The placement of the load cells at the base of the riser, very deep within the flowerpot, allows a significant amount of the riser load to be transferred to the PTV at the fair lead and within the flowerpot via friction. Therefore the load measurements are less than the true parachute riser force. A scale factor is applied to the load measurement based on the aerodynamic drag subtracted from the total drag force as measured by the IMU⁴. This adjustment is accomplished by comparing direct load measurement with the theoretical load measurement that is derived from accelerometer data. A scaling factor can be computed for each stage in order to adjust the load cell measurements into agreement with the accelerometer data. The scaling factors are then linearly interpolated relative to the midpoint of each stage. The uncertainty in the vehicle drag can lead to an uncertainty in two full open Drogue chute performance of 3%, and greater uncertainty for single parachute and reefed Drogue phase of flight.

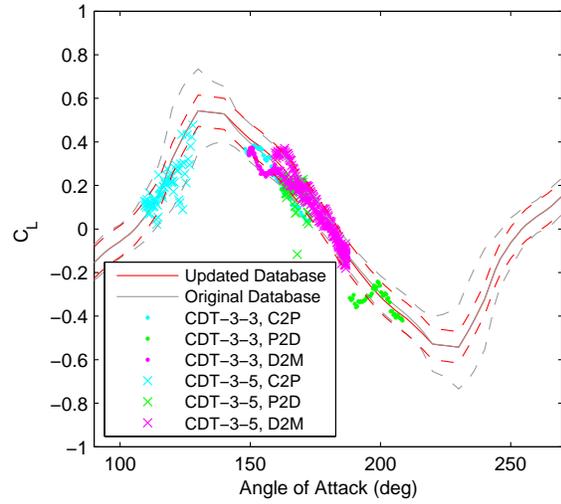
The EDU test program has no time where there isn't a parachute either open or deploying, but engineering judgment is used to determine the times during chute deployment when the non-aerodynamic forces on the PTV are small enough to ignore. For those short durations we can compare the measured drag, as determined from the IMU accelerations, with the PTV database. The original PTV aerodynamic database was adjusted after the first test based on newly available wind tunnel results and the flight measurements. The flight confirmed that the PTV drag was higher than originally predicted and that the new wind tunnel test results should be included in the database. Unfortunately the PTV drag varied across the entire uncertainty of the database and we were unable to reduce the uncertainties. The second test also had enough variability that we have not reduced the uncertainties.

Figure 3(a) shows the drag coefficient as a function of total angle of attack for a number of flight test periods and database values. The solid gray line represents the original database nominal drag. The dashed lines represent the uncertainties, which were large due to variations in wind tunnel and computational fluid dynamics data. The solid red line represents the updated database. It can be seen that the nominal drag is greater from total angle of attack 140 to 180 degrees. The new wind tunnel results were used to adjust the nominal drag higher and to reduce the uncertainties. There are three periods of PTV flight where the drag due to parachutes is relatively small: The CPSS to Programmer flight (C2P), the Programmer to Drogue flight (P2D), and the Drogue to Main (D2M) flight. As can be seen in figure 2, the Programmer chute is static line deployed as the PTV leaves the CPSS and will apply some force on the PTV during deployment. The PTV leads the CPSS through the air, therefore the aerodynamic interaction is minimal between the two objects after the PTV clears the CPSS. The second free-flight period is between Programmer and Drogue flight. The Drogue is mortar deployed simultaneously with the Programmer riser cut, and the mortar could cause a pressure spike on the back surface of the PTV. Finally, the PTV has the longest free flight time between the Drogues and Mains (D2M). The Pilots are mortared out, inflate, and then pull out the Main deployment bags. This time should be the best for determining drag, but as can be seen in the figure, data from the two flights show the drag at the opposite limits of the uncertainty.

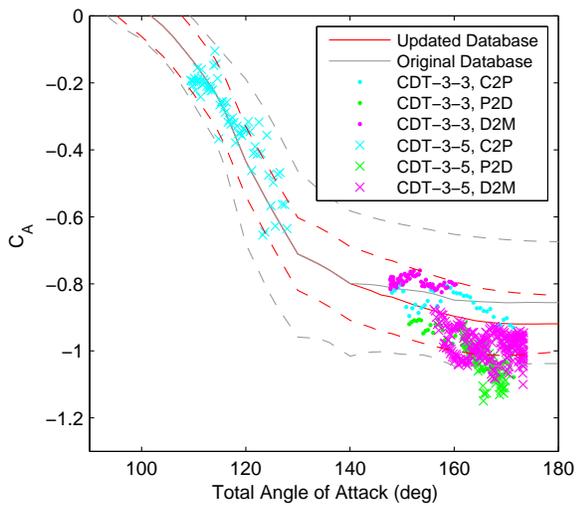
Although the variation of drag could be due to natural unsteadiness of the flow, the dynamic pressure uncertainty, changes in surface roughness, and heat shield gaps all could contribute. Improving the understanding any sources of measurement uncertainty is an ongoing task. Inertial velocity measurements are combined with wind and pressure measurements to determine airspeed. Since the wind and pressure measurements are recorded at different times and locations, there is a fairly large uncertainty in the actual atmosphere that the test vehicle flies through. The uncertainty in drag coefficient is approximately 5% primarily due to uncertainty in dynamic pressure. Capsule drag can be greatly affected by surface roughness, gaps in the surface, or ridges on the surface. The PTV heatshield is designed to have the same outer mold shape as the MPCV and assembled from 13 separate pieces with gaps of up to 3/8" between the panels. On the first flight, those gaps were not covered. On subsequent flights, the gaps were covered with tape.



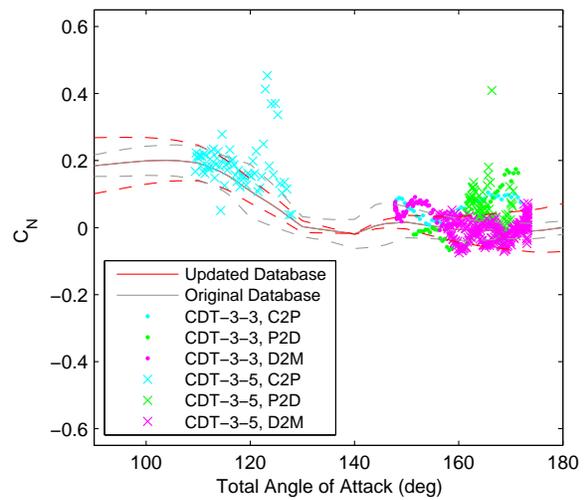
(a) Drag Force Coefficient



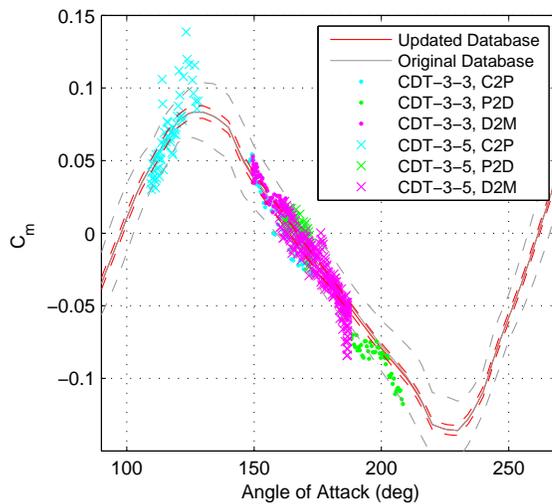
(b) Lift Force Coefficient



(c) Axial Force Coefficient



(d) Normal Force Coefficient



(e) Pitching Moment Coefficient, referenced to CDT-3-5 CG

Figure 3. Comparison of database and measured PTV coefficients as a function of angle of attack.

For completeness, we also extracted all six body axis aerodynamic coefficients during the portions of free-flight. Figure 3 also shows the normal, axial, and lift force coefficients and the pitching moment coefficient. The aerodynamic extraction of the free flight data confirmed the updated static aerodynamic database, but has been unable to reduce the uncertainties. The uncertainties in drag coefficient affect parachute performance calculations. One potential solution in work is to move the load measurement out of and above the flowerpot.

IV. Aerodynamic Reconstruction

Aerodynamic reconstruction can be accomplished with single-body or multibody dynamics simulators. We use FAST, a 6 degree of freedom (6-DOF) multibody simulator developed by the Flight Mechanics and Trajectory Design branch at NASA-JSC. FAST was built (and continues to be improved) to be an easily reconfigured simulation tool for the rapid delivery of atmospheric trajectory design products for conceptual vehicle studies and post-flight analysis products for prototype vehicle test flights. FAST simulates the 6-DOF motion due to aerodynamics and gravity for both the PTV and the parachutes as a coupled system. We use the measured conditions at chute deployment as initial conditions in the simulation and compare the resulting motion with flight data.

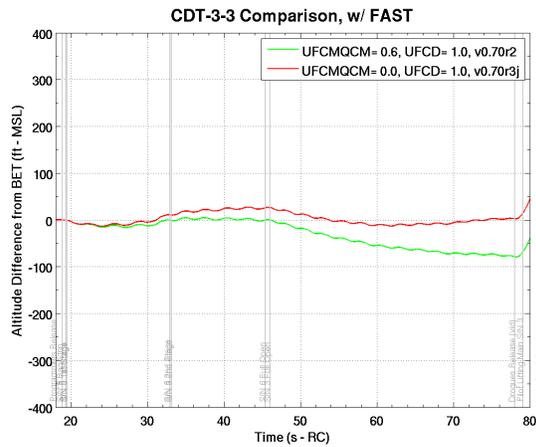
The PTV aerodynamic dynamic stability, called dynamic damping or C_{mq} from here forward, was originally assumed to be equal to that of the MPCV. The first PTV flight experienced pitch motion with rates near the maximum predicted by the Monte Carlo assessment. The PTV flying with two Drogues is shown in figure 4. Aerodynamic reconstructions were accomplished to determine the cause of the relatively large pitch motion. The simulation models the parachute performance and vehicle motion, which we compare to the data throughout flight segments. We adjust the chute performance parameters and the PTV mass properties and aerodynamic properties - within reason - to best match the flight data.

The first parameter that is matched is dynamic pressure, shown in figure 5(b). Small differences in dynamic pressure (~ 1 psf) results in large differences in total drag force on both the PTV and the parachutes, because the drag area (the reference surface area of a parachute multiplied by the experimentally measured non-dimensional drag coefficient) of those components is in the hundreds of square feet. To match dynamic pressure, the total drag of the system must be close to the true value. A very good method for checking that the average dynamic pressure, and hence average drag, is correct is to compare the altitude history. We try to keep the actual and reconstructed altitude difference, as shown in figure 5(a) to less than 75 feet for the Drogue phase of flight by adjusting the parachute drag coefficient. The true parachute drag has large oscillations that are a function of both capsule orientation (wake effects) and Drogue performance, as shown in figure 5(d).

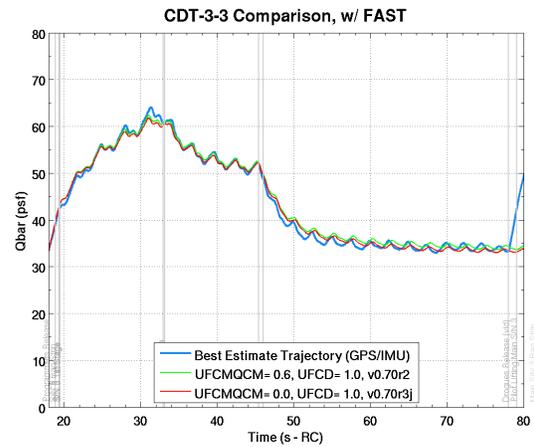
When simulated drag gives acceptable altitude differences and dynamic pressure, the pitch and yaw motion of the vehicle should be simulated well if the aerodynamic dynamic damping database represents the flight vehicle. There are many ways to adjust aerodynamic parameters: scale up the entire database, bias the entire database, use the uncertainties to adjust the utilized value, modify the database point by point, or any combination thereof. Our implementation of the aerodynamic database allows for the former three options to be implemented fairly easily for any aerodynamic value. Because the values of C_{mq} have smaller uncertainties in values of angle of attack and Mach number where the confidence is higher, we decided to use the uncertainties as a basis for modifying damping. We scale the C_{mq} value from the nominal (UFCMQCM = 0) to the maximum uncertainty (UFCMQCM = 1.0) for all values of Mach and angle of attack when accomplishing each reconstruction. When developing a new database based on flight data, we adjust C_{mq} point by point in the database. Of course, as the PTV pitch motion changes the PTV drag changes and large changes require iterating on chute drag. Our metric for quality reconstruction of body motion is the



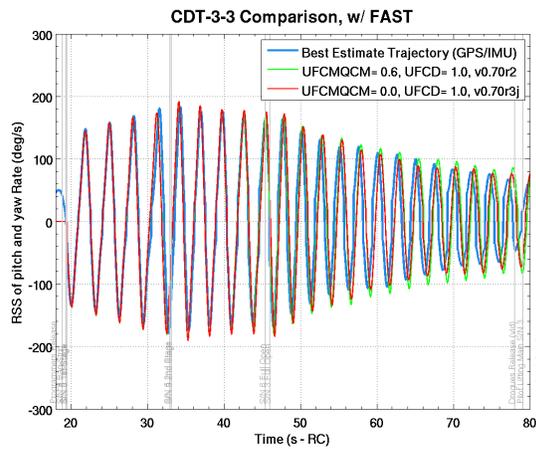
Figure 4. PTV under two Drogues.



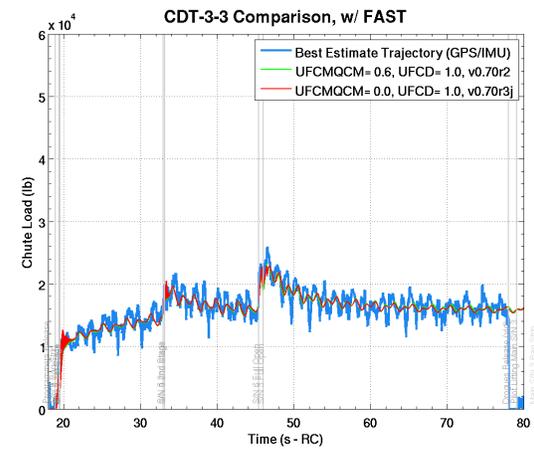
(a) Altitude Difference



(b) Dynamic Pressure



(c) RSS of Pitch and Yaw



(d) Total Parachute Load

Figure 5. Reconstruction of CDT-3-3 with original and new aerodynamic database compared to trajectory.

RSS of pitch and yaw. We try to match both amplitude and frequency by adjusting UFCMQCM and mass moments of inertia.

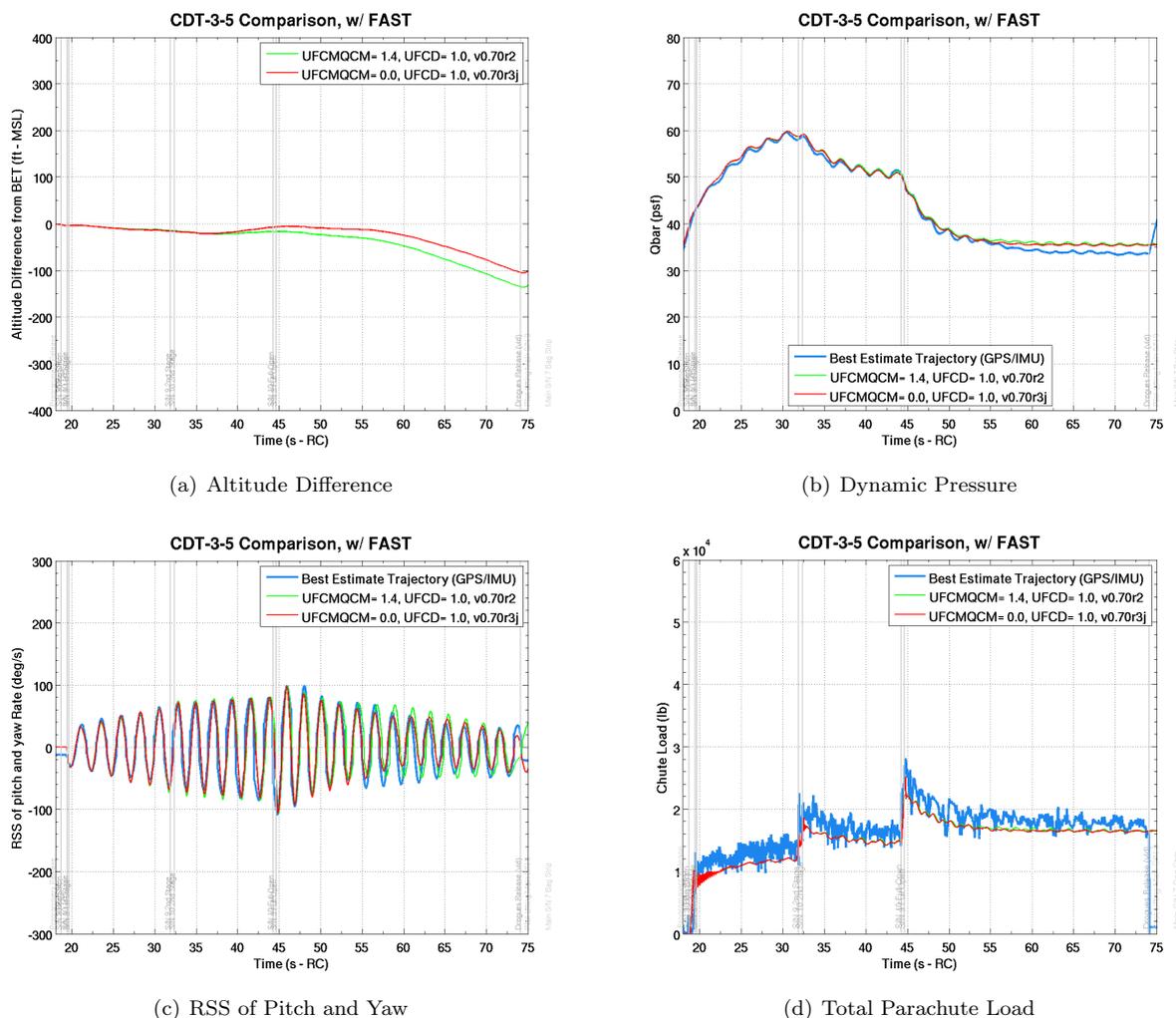


Figure 6. Reconstruction of CDT-3-5 with original and new aerodynamic database compared to trajectory.

As has been mentioned, the first PTV flight had more motion in pitch than expected. The reconstruction process found an UFCMQCM of 0.6, as shown in figure 5(c). I_{yy} had to be increased to 103% of the calculated value to match the frequency of pitch motion. The second PTV flight had again more motion than expected during the second reefed stage of the Drogues. After many attempts at reconstructing the second flight we found that a very large UFCMQCM of 1.2 to 1.4 was required to match the RSS of pitch and yaw rates, as shown in figure 6. Here, the every other cycle of the RSS is negated in order for the analysis to visualize the motion of the vehicle. A key to matching the pitch and yaw rates was adjusting the mass moments of inertia in two dimensions so that the periods of simulated motion matched flight. The best matches for I_{yy} and I_{zz} were 96.5% and 103%, respectively, of the calculated values. The inertia is calculated in ProE and has an uncertainty of 10%, so the relatively small adjustments are reasonable. The two flights had different hang angles under the Drogues, so different ranges of angle of attack were experienced in each flight. Because the PTV shape is different than that of the MPCV, which the dynamic damping database was originally developed for, the C_{mq} is significantly different at certain angles of attack. The second PTV flight happened to oscillate through the region with dynamic damping greater than the uncertainties in the database. The discovery of the issue delayed a flight test in order to develop an updated PTV aerodynamic database, see figure 7, and to create an optimized algorithm that cuts the Drogue parachutes at a better combination of angle of attack and pitch and yaw rates for a safe Main deployment.

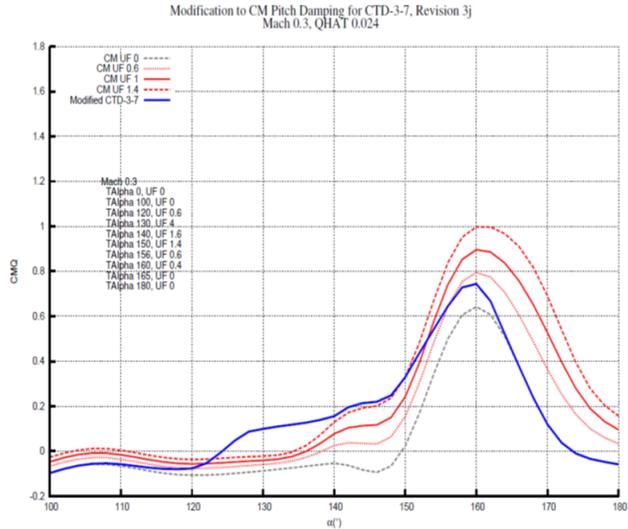


Figure 7. Example of modification to updated C_{mq} database.

V. Conclusion

The NASA/Jacobs CPAS team is continually adding to the knowledge of parachute performance in the wake and coupled dynamics of a capsule by testing with the PTV. Analyzing the aerodynamics of the PTV has proven to be an integral part of the overall test program and has been used to improve the quality and reliability of the tests. Understanding vehicle drag is important when characterizing chute performance if the load measurements are not made above the fairlead, and we continue to evaluate the PTV drag. Development of a more representative dynamic damping database anchored to flight test data has allowed testing to proceed with reasonable and better understood risk.

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