Hollow Cathode Assembly Development for the HERMeS Hall Thruster

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Presentation Outline

• Introduction
• Cathode Development Approach
• Cathode Characterization Test Results
• BaO Cathode Wear-Test:
  – Cathode Configuration
  – Wear-test Configuration
  – Wear-test Performance Results
Introduction

• HERMeS Thruster Development for Asteroid Redirect Robotic Mission (ARRM)
  – Each 12.5 kW HERMeS Hall thruster on spacecraft will be required to process ~1800 kg of Xenon
  – Hollow cathode required to provide 8 – 32 ADC for 34,000 hours
  – Two emitter technologies are being investigated
    • Lanthanum Hexaboride (LaB6)
    • Barium-based impregnated (411, BaO)
Hollow Cathode Emitter Technology Assessment

- Hollow Cathode capability assessed through three activities
  - Cathode Testing
    - Characterization testing to determine temperature & plasma properties to identify cathode configuration to support thruster testing
    - Wear-testing of hollow cathodes at thruster operating conditions
    - LaB6 heater life testing to validate heater reliability
  - Develop mature cathode assembly design for HERMeS thruster
    - Detailed design of hollow cathodes compatible with HERMeS completed
      - Analyzed structural and thermal behavior
      - Prepared for environmental testing of completed units
  - Assess systemic benefits and consequences of use of emitter options
    - Quantify benefits of LaB6 emitter resistance to propellant oxygen contamination
- Cathode emitter option down-select & recommendations expected to be completed by end of Summer 2016
Characterization Testing – BaO cathode results

- **Cathode operating behavior measured:**
  - Emitter temperature measured with internal optical probes
  - Cathode plasma properties measured with probes internally installed
- **Cathode Orifice Size options investigated**

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<th>Configuration</th>
<th>BaO</th>
<th>LaB6</th>
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- **Results:**
  - Configuration 1 temperature behavior represented best match for stable operation and margin
  - Plasma measurements showed broad plasma distribution on emitter interior
Cathode Configuration for Wear-test

- Cathode Assembly Breakdown:

- Development cathode allowed rapid changes for characterization testing while being compatible with HERMeS TDU thrusters
Thruster Simulator Anode

• Anode incorporates magnetic coil to simulate the equivalent field magnitude imposed by HERMeS thruster magnet coils when operating at nominal run condition
• Mikellides & Goebel have verified simulator design represents HERMeS thruster
Cathode West-Test Set-up

• **Electrical Configuration**

• **Data Acquisition System**
  – Data logger connected to software on computer for data monitoring and display
  – Interlocks enabled in software that disables power supply operation in event of limit trip
Wear-test Facility

- **VF-56 Test Facility**
  - 1.0 m dia X 1.0 m L
  - Cryo-pumped – $2 \times 10^{-6}$ Torr base, $10^{-4}$ Torr at run condition
Xenon Feed-system

- **Cleanliness Requirements:**
  - 99.9995% purity xenon
  - Feed-system integrity verified by bake-out & leak-rate testing
    - Per GRC procedures developed for past qual/flight programs
  - Point-of-Use Purity test
    - Collected xenon gas sample for verification by commercial vendor
    - Feed-system passed for all contaminants
Cathode Operating Conditions

• **Steady State:**
  – Discharge Current = 24.8 ADC
    • Incorporating corrections for thruster effects
  – Mass Flow Rate = 1.45 mg/s (14.7 sccm) (7% condition)
  – Keeper current = floating
  – Magnet Current sufficient to generate 180 G field on anode centerline

• Similar conditions as cathode operating in TDU-1 2000 wear-test

• **Data measured**
  – Voltages – discharge, keeper (powered/floating), magnet coil
  – Currents – discharge, magnetic, keeper
  – Mass flow rate
  – Cathode orifice plate temperature
  – AC behavior: discharge voltage, keeper voltage, discharge current
  – Facility Pressure
Wear Test Timeline & Progress

- **Wear-test initiated 5/20/2016**

Legend:

- **X** = unplanned interruptions
- **✓** = performance characterizations completed
- Green arrow = planned characterizations

Wear Test Duration 2,000 hours
Cathode Performance Characterizations

- Parametric Sweep to check cathode operation over entire range
  - Limited operation where necessary – discharge voltage $\leq 30$ V
  - Keeper-only operation to provide common check points with cathode performance in thruster
- Characterizations performed every 500 hours

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Cathode Operation to Date

- Discharge voltage, cathode tip temperature have been stable
  - Voltage = 14.3 V nominally
  - Temperature = 962 °C
    - Temperature measured with type thermocouple spot-welded to cathode tube at orifice plate weld
    - Decaying temperature may be attributable to changing contact conditions
Cathode Operation to Date (cont’d)

• Keeper Voltage measurements showing variation
  – Changes with test interruptions suggest changes in keeper surface conditions may be factor
    • Facility regeneration at hour 430 may have lead to oxide coating
    • Recovery after performance characterization may indicate removal of coating
Performance Characterization Results

• Discharge voltage exhibited agreement between characterization checks
Performance Characterization Results (cont’d)

- Cathode tip temperature exhibited agreement between characterizations
- Insensitive over flow range
Performance Characterization Results (cont’d)

- Periodic checks over operating range showing consistent behavior
Summary Remarks

• Cathode assembly assessment and development activities are underway to support long-life operation for HERMeS thruster

• Combination of testing, high fidelity cathode assembly design, and system-level integration assessments is being pursued to determine emitter option for use in HERMeS thruster
  – Down-select to be completed by end of this summer

• BaO Cathode Assembly is being wear-tested in dedicated facility at VF56
  – Same conditions as cathode operating in HERMeS TDU-1 thruster being wear-tested at GRC

• Cathode operating parameters have been stable
  – Keeper voltage variation appears related to test interruptions (coating possible culprit)

• Upon completion of 2,000 hour test, cathode condition will be assessed for any thruster-specific wear mechanisms
  – TDU-1 hollow cathode will also be examined