

**Production and Analysis of Alloy  
Composites Exhibiting Improved Bonding  
Using a Novel Vacuum Casting Process**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of  
the requirements of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**by**

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***In memory of my daughter  
Lisa Michelle Huggett***

# ABSTRACT

A new composite manufacturing process has been developed that permits the production of white iron/steel composites. The key differences of the new vacuum casting process compared to other current processes for composite manufacture include:

- i. Elimination of machining or grinding
- ii. Removal of brazing alloy
- iii. Enhanced design flexibility
- iv. Enhanced control of microstructural features
- v. Lower cost of production

The new vacuum casting process involves the following key steps:

- Heating a white cast iron and steel substrate together within a vacuum furnace until the temperature inside the vacuum furnace is typically 50°C above the liquidus of the white cast iron.
- Before the white cast iron becomes molten, adding a partial pressure of inert gas (typically nitrogen) into the vacuum furnace to increase the pressure of the chamber above the vapour pressure of the liquid white cast iron.
- Holding the temperature above the liquidus of the white cast iron to allow the white iron to partially dissolve the steel substrate.

The experimental work outlined in this research has permitted the development of a low melting point white cast iron having the nominal composition of Fe-12Cr-1.6Mn-1.0Ni-0.5Si-4.1C, with a measured liquidus temperature of 1209°C. The microstructure of the low melting point alloy consists of a small volume fraction of primary austenite, with a eutectic of  $M_7C_3$  carbides and austenite. Some of the  $M_7C_3$  carbides have undergone a quasi-peritectic reaction. The austenite has undergone a partial transformation to form ledeburite (ferrite plus  $M_3C$  carbide in the form of cementite).

The microstructures of the vacuum cast samples show the presence of four zones within the interface region.

- i. Zone 1 – original steel substrate, consisting of hypoeutectoid steel
- ii. Zone 2 – heat affected zone steel substrate
- iii. Zone 3 – “carbide-free” area of low melting point white cast iron adjacent to interface
- iv. Zone 4 – low melting point white cast iron

Manufacturing and field trials have been conducted on a range of composite products to establish the potential benefit of using composite white iron/steel components in mining wear applications. The vacuum casting process has been used successfully to produce a significant volume of trial wear parts, indicating the process is robust enough to be considered for repetitive production, and can also be adapted to manufacture a wide range of products.

# DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that this thesis has not been submitted previously for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any degree. The research work presented was performed under the guidance of Associate Professor Besim Ben-Nissan and Dr Greg Heness of the Department of Chemistry, Materials and Forensic Science (UTS). I certify that I have written the thesis and that help that I have received in its preparation, and all sources used, have been duly acknowledged.

Production Note:

Signature removed prior to publication.

Paul Huggett

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor and mentor Associate Professor Besim Ben-Nissan for his patience, guidance, and understanding throughout this research and in particular during the period of grieving after the loss of my daughter Lisa to cancer in 2003.

I would also like to thank my co-supervisor and friend Dr Greg Heness for his support and guidance.

Special thanks is also extended to Dr Richard Wuhrer for his support and assistance with the electron microscopy and microanalysis, some of which has involved many sessions of after-hours of work.

The following people have provided assistance with various aspects of the research project:

- Dr Ron Wise and Lynton McCreery from Cape Range Wireless Ltd who assisted with project funding.
- Stan Jones for providing labour and assistance during foundry trials and alloy production.
- The staff at the AMTC Central TAFE, Subiaco Campus for the provision of foundry facilities.

Finally, I extend my sincere thanks, love and appreciation to my wife Carolyn who has not only endured her own loss and personal grieving during the course of this study, but has also provided inspiration, patience and focus when at times I was unable to see my way forward.

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## NOMENCLATURE

$\phi(y)$	=	Gaussian Error Function
<i>Bulk C%</i>	=	overall carbon weight percent
$C_0$	=	concentration of semi-infinite solid
$C_s$	=	surface concentration
$C_x$	=	concentration of diffusing species
<i>C%</i>	=	carbon weight percent
<i>Cr%</i>	=	chromium weight percent
<i>Cr/C</i>	=	chromium/carbon ratio
$D$	=	diffusivity or diffusion coefficient
$D_0$	=	temperature independent pre-exponential, m <sup>2</sup> /s
$\frac{dC}{dx}$	=	concentration gradient
<i>EC Cr%</i>	=	eutectic Carbide Chromium Content
<i>ECVF%</i>	=	eutectic carbide volume fraction %
<i>ETC%</i>	=	eutectic trough carbon %
<i>FM Cr%</i>	=	ferrous Matrix Chromium Content %
$J_x$	=	flux of diffusing species
<i>PC Cr%</i>	=	primary Carbide Chromium Content
<i>PCVF%</i>	=	primary carbide volume fraction %
<i>PFMVF%</i>	=	primary ferrous matrix volume fraction %
$Q_d$	=	activation energy for diffusion, J/mol
$R$	=	Gas constant, 8.314 J.mol <sup>-1</sup> .K <sup>-1</sup>
$t$	=	time, seconds
$T$	=	Temperature, Kelvin
$x$	=	distance, mm

# OUTLINE OF THESIS

**Chapter One** provides background information and significance of this research work.

**Chapter Two** describes the development of a low melting point white cast iron. The low melting point white iron development involved analysis of the Fe-Cr-C phase diagram and computer modelling using CALPHAD techniques to result in a white cast iron having a liquidus (melting point) of approximately 1200°C. The low melting point white iron was essential to enable standard electrical element materials to be adopted for the vacuum heat treatment furnace development.

**Chapter Three** describes the development of the vacuum casting process, providing theory of vacuum heat treatment, background to other composite alloy manufacturing processes, and the experimental work and outcomes for the new vacuum based composite alloy manufacturing process.

**Chapter Four** provides a detailed analysis of the composite interface developed between a steel substrate and the low melting point white cast iron. The analysis of the interface is used to provide confirmation of the vacuum casting model developed in Chapter 3, and to demonstrate the quality and power of the vacuum process to develop 100% fully bonded metallurgical bonds.

**Chapter Five** provides detail on the development of trial parts for use in various mining applications. The trial parts involved the manufacture of full scale parts for use on heavy duty mining equipment. Laboratory wear test results are provided and compared to field trial performance.

**Chapter Six** outlines the conclusion of the thesis and summarises the project outcomes.

**References** have been listed in the sequence of their use within the main thesis text and then numerically numbered.

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