

Pressure Measurements of Wake Vortices near the Ground

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It has been known since the beginning of air flight that an aircraft leaves in its wake a pair of highly concentrated, counter-rotating trailing vortices. With the introduction of jumbo jets, the vortices generated by these aircraft can become a real hazard to smaller planes especially near airports where encounters are frequent. In the interest of safety and airport efficiency, it is desirable to remotely detect the vortices in order to avoid a vortex encounter.

Electromagnetic¹⁻⁴ and acoustic⁵ sensors are now being used to detect vortex wake turbulence. Because these systems are inherently complex and costly, a simple pressure sensor was tested to ascertain whether it would be possible to detect the presence of a vortex. A barocel† sensor was employed. It measured the differential pressure using the motion of a metal diaphragm separating two enclosures: one enclosure is connected to an external pressure port; the other is opened to the ambient conditions and is sealed before each data run.

The tests were conducted at the National Aviation Facilities Experimental Center (NAFEC), Atlantic City, N. J., and consisted of 175 flybys: 24 DC-7, 38 B-747, 10 C-5A, 24 B-707/DC-8, 52 C-141 and 27 others (P-3, Lear Jet, DC-3, etc.). An acoustic vortex detector⁵ was used to determine the height of the vortices as they drifted over the pressure sensor. All the relevant flight parameters (velocity, gross weight, flap configuration, etc.) as well as the meteorological conditions were provided for the DC-7, B-747 and B-707/DC-8 flybys. The horizontal location of the pressure sensor was varied from 150 ft (45.7 m) to 300 ft (91.4 m) from the aircraft ground track and the distance above the ground varied from 1 ft (0.3 m) to 5 ft (1.5 m).

Figure 1† represents a sample of the data from the DC-7 flights. The error in the theoretical points is due to the error in the acoustically measured height of the vortex (typically ± 5 ft). A theoretical pressure differential for a vortex near the ground was calculated using Bernoulli's principle for a vortex of circulation Γ and its image:

$$\Delta P = \frac{\rho \Gamma^2 h^2}{2\pi^2(h^2 - d^2)^2} \quad (1)$$

where ρ is the air density, h is the height of the vortex above the ground, and d is the height of the sensor. (One may question the applicability of Bernoulli's principle for a vortex system which includes turbulent flow, but the data and the

fact that the flow is measured far from the vortex core suggests that the equation is valid.) Γ was determined assuming an elliptically loaded wing:

$$\Gamma = \frac{4W}{\pi b V \rho} \quad (2)$$

and using the known weight (W), wingspan (b) and aircraft velocity (V). The pressure differential measurements are lower than the theoretical values (within experimental error) probably because the actual Γ was less than the predicted value (due to losses occurring during the wake rollup which in turn are caused by the ambient turbulence, the flap configuration, and the consequence of wing-mounted engines). The disparities between the measured and predicted pressure differentials for vortices below 40 ft (12.2 m) probably result from the neglect of viscous decay and vortex breakdown for vortices that have been in ground effect for any length of time.

A matrix of pressure sensors could be used in an airport environment to monitor the existence and horizontal motions of wake vortices. Such a system would be limited by the ambient winds; they limit the maximum height at which a vortex can be detected. (When the winds were above 10 mph, the DC-7 vortices were not detected if the vortex was over 60 ft above the ground.) When the wind velocity is comparable to $\Gamma/\pi h$, the vortex signature is comparable to the pressure differential caused by the ambient turbulence.

Pressure sensors would be valuable for monitoring vortices between parallel runways where the vortices are well within ground effect. However, when the ambient winds are high and the use of pressure sensors becomes questionable; the problem should be minimal as the vortices should quickly sweep away and/or dissipate.

References

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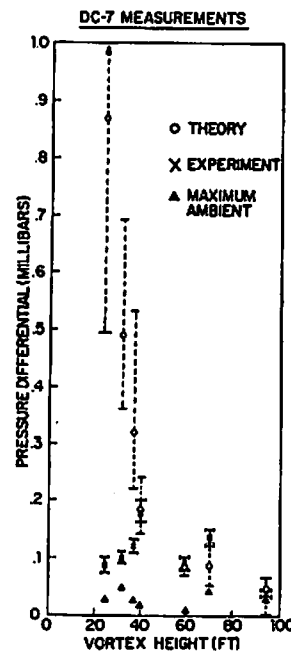


Fig. 1 Pressure differential vs height of the vortex above the ground.

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† Type 1023 Barocel Electronic Manometer manufactured by CGS Datametrics, Watertown, Mass. 02172.

‡ In Fig. 1 the circles are the theoretical predictions, x's are the measured values, and the triangles are the measured maximum values of the ambient wind-induced turbulence.

² Francis, D. G., "Development of a Vortex Laser Doppler Velocimeter," *Proceedings of the 1971 National Aerospace Electronics Conference*, IEEE, AIAA, 1971, Dayton, Ohio, pp. 36-40.

³ Huffaker, R. M., Jelalian, A., Keene, W., Sonnenschein, C. and Thomson, J. A. L., "Applications of Laser Doppler Systems to Vortex Measurement and Detection," *Aircraft Wake Turbulence and its Detection*, 1st ed., Plenum Press, New York, 1971, pp. 113-124.

⁴ Easterbrook, C. C. and Joos, N. W., "The Utility of Doppler Radar in the Study of Aircraft Wingtip Vortices," *Aircraft Wake Turbulence and its Detection*, 1st ed., Plenum Press, New York, 1971, pp. 97-112.

⁵ Kodis, R. D., "Wake Vortex Sensors," *Proceedings of the FAA Symposium on Turbulence*, Federal Aviation Administration, March, 1971, Washington, D.C., p. 28.