A METHOD TO EVALUATE THE IMPACT OF POWER DEMAND ON HPT BLADE CREEP LIFE

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ABSTRACT

Peak load operation requires gas turbines to operate at high firing temperature with consequence reduction in the useful lives of components. This paper studies the quantitative relationship between gas turbine power setting and the hot gaspath components' life consumption. A 165MW gas turbine engine is modelled and investigated in this study. A comparative lifing model, which performs stress and thermal analyses, estimates the minimum creep life of components using the parametric Larson Miller method. This lifing model was integrated with in-house performance simulation software to simulate the engine performances at design point and offdesign conditions. The results showed that the combined effect of the operating environment and the power demand could have significant impact on blade creep life. Predicting this impact will aid gas turbine users in the decision making processes associated with gas turbine operation.

INTRODUCTION

The significant increase in the demand for electricity has led to a continuous improvement in the level of technology of industrial gas turbine engines. In addition, there is sustained pressure to improve efficiency and this has led to a situation where gas turbine hot section components are exposed to incredible amounts of stress and extreme temperatures. Thus the components of gas turbine engine will be subject to several failure mechanisms, for example, low cycle fatigue, high cycle fatigue, and thermal fatigue and creep (Weber et al., 2005).

In the case of stationary gas turbine engines, creep is an important failure mechanism in the reduction of hot section component life. The behaviour of creep failure mechanisms depends on the engine operating conditions, mode of operation, the design parameters (e.g. cooling effectiveness, material, geometry, etc) and details of the critical hot section components in question. Apart from the aerodynamic/thermodynamic characteristics, structural/mechanical characteristics, also affect the design parameters of such components. For economic and safety reasons life assessment is an important issue to gas turbine users. Overestimating the blade life leads to possible failures and economic losses; however, underestimating the blades' life will result in over-maintenance. As the life limits provided by the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) are normally calculated on the basis of a design envelope of expected base load, calculated mechanical and thermal stresses as a function of the operating condition and the capability of the materials within those conditions, the guidelines do not always address the specific operating environment and requirements of each operator. In view of this, having knowledge of how an engine responds to changes in the operating and health conditions will be necessary as these changes affect engine performance parameters and hence alter the creep life (Abdul Ghafir et al., 2010). By using a lifing module based on stress and temperature variations and using the Larson-Miller Parameter (LMP) the time to failure can be calculated.

Several researchers have stressed the effect of design parameter and engine performance on turbine blade creep life. (Wood, 1999) assessed the useful life of components from the metallurgical point of view. (Marahleh et al., 2006) evaluated the creep life of turbine blades using a specimen cut-out of the blade combined with two parametric approaches; LMP and Robinson's rule. (Mohammad and Masoud, 2009) used calculative and experimental methods to predict the remaining life of an IN738 LC gas turbine blade. The LMP method was used to predict the remaining life and the effects of creep on the material microstructure was considered from metallographic, creep and hardness tests. (Naeem, 1999; Naeem, 2009) has investigated the effect of engine deterioration, ambient conditions and engine performance on creep life using a design approach model. (Weber et al., 2005) presented an online approach that integrated both mechanical and performance engineering with metallurgical considerations for assessing remaining blade serviceable life. (Abdul Ghafir et al., 2010) investigated the effect of engine performance (e.g. PCN), altitude and Mach number on the creep life of a high pressure turbine blade in Turbo shaft engine using LMP. (Eshati et al., 2010) investigated the relationship between design parameters such as cooling effectiveness, radial temperature distortion factor (RTDF) and material types; and creep life consumption of stationary gas turbines using a physics based life model. Other investigators have focused on the interaction of different failure mechanisms with the creep, for example (Tong et al., 2001; Fournier et al., 2008) have considered the interaction of creep, fatigue and oxidation. However, very limited information is available in the literature that considers the effect of power demand combined with other working condition on the creep life of hot section components in industrial gas turbine.

This paper studies the impact of changes in power demand at different operating conditions on the creep life consumption of the hot section components for both healthy and degraded engines. A 165MW power plant is being investigated for electrical power generation (GECOL, 2010). The purpose of the present paper is to quantify the dependence of decreasing operational effectiveness of a gas turbine power plant upon the engines' deterioration for different operating and ambient conditions. Predicting this impact will facilitate users taking appropriate corrective actions or making changes in the mission profile and/or configuration of the engines. An in-house gas turbine performance modelling tool called Turbomatch was used to develop and simulate representative thermodynamic models of the engine investigated (Palmer, 1999) (Vassilios, Turbomatch Manual). Data is gathered from the Turbomatch simulations and used as input to the lifing module. The blade geometry and the stress and thermal properties are considered by the lifing module based on a constant cross section area and the LMP to estimate the lowest blade creep life.

LIFE APPROACHES

Methods for life estimation as classified by (Eshati et al., 2010), are summarised and presented in Table1.

The design approach requires details of the component's material deformation, engine history and relevant fraction rule in order to calculate component temperature, stress and creep life (Sakai et al., 2000) (Jin et al., 2006). Non-Destructive Test (NDT) and Destructive Test (DT) can also be used to quantify the damage further (Wood, 1999).

The Post-service Approach (Ray et al., 2007); (Marahleh et al., 2006) is based on after-service sampling, examination and evaluation requires access to components. The state of the material of the components is determined either by measurement or direct assessment of the extent of any damage experienced. These are compared with standard scatter bands to provide a refined prediction of remaining life. The main method of assessing the remaining life involves destructive and non-destructive tests and microstructural evaluation.

In the Statistical Approach (Zhimin et al., 2001) creep life is predicted using statistical, probabilistic and artificial intelligent methods. The objective of this approach is to build a relationship between the creep life and the driving factors.

	Design Approach	Post-service Approach	Statistical Approach
to the second	 Analytical method. 	 Non-destructive test. 	 Statistical tools.
	 Empirical method. 	 Destructive test. 	 Probabilistic tools.
	 Numerical method. 		 Artificial intelligent
2.			methods.
sec.	 Life estimation can be 	 Identifies the components that 	 Reduced complexity.
	performed at design	need to be monitored.	 Fast computing.
1	stage.	 Offers different techniques for 	 Identifies driving
Ś	 Low cost if low 	both destructive and non-	factors.
₹	fidelity model is used.	destructive test.	 Tackle the uncertainties
	 Based on empiric data 	 Needs prior techniques to 	Requires prior models.
20	to build the model.	estimate life at design stage.	The factors may vary
a la	 High complexity to 	 Time consuming. 	according to the nature of
Disade.	achieve.	 Performed during maintenance. 	the research.
	 High cost. 	 Inaccurate if un-calibrated. 	
~	-	 device used. 	

Table 1: Lifing Approaches.

METHODOLOGY

This paper focuses on creep as the major failure mode and does not discuss interactions between different failure modes. Turbomatch (Cranfield University's existing component based gas turbine performance and diagnostics software model) was used to simulate the gas turbine thermodynamic behaviour at design point and off-design point conditions. Using a physicsbased model, thermal and mechanical stress analyses were performed on the HP turbine blades.

In order to study the impact of operating and ambient conditions on the creep life of a gas turbine engine's hot section, a model single shaft engine was created. In addition, the operating environment of the gas turbine engine, which plays a major role in the performance of the gas turbine and the power plant is presented here. Daily power demand from a power plant in Zawia (a city in Libya) and profile of its ambient temperature is seen in Figure 1. It is evident from the figure that the highest power demand combined with the highest ambient temperature is around midday.



Figure 1: Ambient Temperature and power demand profile for summer day (GECOL, 2010).

CREEP FACTOR

To perform an impact analysis comparison with a certain reference value is necessary. With blades creep life assessment, knowing the remnant creep life is, say, 20,000 hours, is not sufficient as it does not reflect how well the engine is being used. For example, if we state that the 20,000 hours is, say, 40% shorter than expected, this would indicate that the engine has been operating under severe thermal and mechanical loading. The value of 40% in this case is an indication of the magnitude of the impact of operating the engine away from design point operation. Possessing this information allows the operators to better optimise mission profiles or establish an effective maintenance plan that will reduce operating and maintenance costs.

This paper uses the Creep Factor (C_F) approach to measure the impact of actual operating conditions on creep life and to quantify how quickly the creep life is being reached relative to the specified operating condition desired by the operators. C_F is defined as a ratio between the calculated creep life remaining at the actual operating conditions and the remnant creep life calculated for the reference conditions (Abdul Ghafir et al., 2010):

$$C_{\rm F} = \frac{L_{\rm c}}{L_{\rm cRef}} \tag{1}$$

Where: L_c denotes the calculated remnant life for actual operating condition, and L_{cRef} denotes the reference remnant life at user-defined reference operating conditions. This reference operating condition can be those of the design point, baseline operation and nominal operating conditions.

A realistic remnant life that is useful to the users will allow them to perform a realistic impact analysis, and the C_F value will help the user to assess changes in the remaining creep life of components operating at conditions which deviate from the normal user operating conditions. The C_F will also help eliminate dependency on the OEM baseline operation which is not always achievable when the user-defined normal operating conditions are far from the suggested baseline operation (Abdul Ghafir et al., 2010).

In general when:

1. $C_{\rm F}$ = 1, the engine is being operated at the reference condition with Lc =Lc_{Ref}

2. $C_F < 1$, the engine is being operated in a worse condition than its reference condition hence reducing the blades' remnant life.

3. $C_F > 1$, the engine is being operated under better conditions than its reference conditions thus increasing the blades' remnant life.

BLADE GEOMETRY AND MATERIAL DATA

The component with the highest probability of requiring maintenance is the high pressure turbine (HPT) because of the

effect of combined high temperature and high rotational speed on the centrifugal and thermal stresses acting on the HPT blades.

In this study, the blade geometry specifications were obtained from the industrial engine at the power plant during engine overhaul. The details of the first stage blade turbine geometry data are presented in Table 2. The material used in this investigation is Nimonic alloy (Special Metals, 2010) and its properties are shown in Table 3. Figure 2 shows an actual photograph of the blade.

Table 2: Blade geometry			
Geometrical Parameter	Values	Unit	
Tip radius	0.95	m	
Root radius	0.80	m	
Blade height	0.20	m	
Blade chord	0.08	m	
Blade mass	6.32	kg	



Figure 2: Engine Blade, courtesy of (GECOL, 2010)

Table 3: Material data			
	Density (Kg/m ³)	Melting range °C	Specific heat (J/Kg°C)
Material	8180	1310	753

PERFORMANCE SIMULATION

Using Turbomatch, a single-spool engine performance model was developed, based on the layout in Figure 3, and used to develop and run representative thermodynamic models of the engine investigated. The tool has the ability to simulate different thermodynamic cycles and processes while analysing the overall performance of the engine including among other things the effects of cooling flows, air and gas mixing, component degradation, variable geometry (including compressors, turbines and exhaust nozzles) as well as extraction of bleed air and shaft power off takes. Turbomatch can also calculate steady state engine performance at both design point and off-design conditions. In this study Turbomatch was used to develop and run a thermodynamic model of the engine and the cooling flows are extracted as shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3: General layout of the engine.

Table 4 presents the engine performance parameters used in modelling the engine.

Parameter	Value
Pressure ratio	15:1
Power output	165MW
Exhaust gas flow rate	530 kg/s
Thermal efficiency	37%
Turbine entry temperature	1378 K

THERMAL MODEL

The model is intended, primarily, to calculate the temperature of the blade for the first stage of the HP turbine. The model starts from a value of overall effectiveness calculated by the designer based on the cooling technology of the blade. The air coolant temperature (T_{cin}) entering the blades, which comes from the last stage of the HP compressor, and the temperature of gas (T_g) surrounding the blades are both determined from the Turbomatch simulation. Also, the overall cooling effectiveness is assumed based on the technology of the blade and NGV outlet temperature as shown in Figure 4 (Koff, 2003). Thus the model calculates the temperature of the blade metal (T_b).

As the temperatures change with operating conditions, the model is continuously updated and the new blade metal temperature is obtained. The creep model calculates component life according to (T_b) (Torbidoni and Horlock, 2005).

$$\varepsilon = \frac{T_g - T_b}{T_g - T_{cin}}$$
(2)

Re-arranging Equation 2, the blade metal temperature obtained using Equation 3:

$$T_{b} = T_{g} - \varepsilon (T_{g} - T_{cin})$$
(3)

Here T_g is gas stream temperature, T_b blade metal temperature, T_{cin} inlet cooling temperature and ϵ cooling effectiveness.



Figure 4: Cooling mechanisms in turbine blades (Koff, 2003)

BLADE CREEP LIFE ASSESSMENT MODEL

Here, a creep life model has been developed (see Figure 5) for use with the first stage rotor blade of a typical stationary HPT of the gas turbine. The approach used for assessing blade creep life was to develop a creep life model which consisted of sub-models for creep, thermal behaviour, stress analysis and performance using Turbomatch. The output from this model was combined with the blade geometry data to predict the stresses and temperatures in the blade metal at different locations along the span of the blade. The results from the thermal and stress model are input in the creep model (LMP) which estimates the remaining creep life of the blade.



Figure 5: Creep life assessment model.

STRESS MODEL

While there are many different sources of stress in turbine blades, this paper considers only direct centrifugal stresses, which arise because the mass of blade and is a function of blade rotational speed (PCN).

For the creep life calculation, the centrifugal stresses on the blade were evaluated from root to tip. The data used in this model such as rotational speed was generated with Turbomatch. In this study, the blade was divided into several sections as shown in Figure 6.

It is assumed in the model that the axial velocity remains constant along the span of the blade and the centrifugal forces act at the blade section centre of gravity. The centrifugal force on a rotating section is expressed as (Vigna, 2006):

$$CF_{sec} = \text{mass} \times \omega^2 \times d_{Cg} \tag{4}$$

Where mass is the mass of the component, ω is the angular speed of the component, d_{Cg} is the distance between the rotation axis and the section centre of gravity (Cg).



Figure 6: Typical blade sections

Assuming the blade section has a rectangular shape its mass will be equal to density*cross-sectional area*height, and the centrifugal force calculated using Equation (5) will be:

$$CF_{sec} = \rho \times A_{AvCs} \times h_{sec} \times \omega^2 \times d_{Cg}$$
(5)

Where ρ is the density of the material, A_{AvCs} is is the average cross-sectional area between the top and the bottom of the section, h_{sec} is the section height, and d_{Cg} is the distance between the rotation axis and the section Cg. Thus the centrifugal stress acting on a blade of constant cross-sectional area can be calculated using Equation (6):

$$\sigma_{\text{Sec}} = \rho \times h_{\text{sec}} \times \omega^2 \times d_{\text{Cg}} \tag{6}$$

CREEP MODEL

To obtain a reasonably conservative estimate of creep life, either at the current operating condition or the reference operating condition, the LMP approach was used in the model. From Arrhenius's Law, the equation can be expressed as (Haslam and Cookson, 2007):

$$LMP = \frac{T}{1000} (logt_f + C)$$
(7)

Re-arranging, t_f can be written as:

$$t_{f=10} \left(\frac{1000 \text{ LMP}}{T} - C\right) \tag{8}$$

Where LMP is the Larson-Miller Parameter, T is the temperature of the material, t_f is the time to failure, and C is a constant. The constant C is often generalised to 20 in industrial applications but it can vary between 13 and 27 depend on material in equation (Kaufman et al., 2007).

For a turbine blade of a known specific material, where the metal temperature and stresses have been found from previous models, t_f for both current and reference operating conditions was estimated before the C_F was determined from Equation (1). The stress will vary with blade section, so creep life will also be different for different blade sections. The minimum creep life calculated will be taken as the value which represents the blade's remnant life.

INDUSTRIAL GT PERFORMANCE DETERIORATION

The deterioration of industrial gas turbine has been studied since the ideal cycle of Brayton was modified to represent the real conditions. At the end of 1940's it was observed that the gas turbine deterioration affected the power production and increased the fuel consumption (Zwebek and Pilidis, 2003a; Zwebek and Pilidis, 2003b). There are several types of deterioration that might occur in a gas turbine engine, and this study considered compressor deterioration due to the ingestion of dust mixed with the air otherwise referred to as fouling, which decreases the compressor isentropic efficiency as well as flow capacity. Fouling and erosion have been demonstrated to affect the thermal efficiency and output power of the engine (Ben Hariz, 2010). Moreover, the accumulation of dust reduces the tip clearance and increase the surface roughness of blades (Kurz and Brun, 2001). These changes in the blades affect the compressor delivery pressure. In this study, a clean and deteriorated engine with up to 5% reduction of efficiency and flow capacity are considered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, parametric analysis of the effect of turbine entry temperature (TET), ambient temperature and power demand are presented. During this investigation, the reference off-design point was selected for relative rotational speed (PCN), and cooling effectiveness (ϵ) of 0.98 and 0.55 respectively. A PCN value of 0.98 means a rotational speed that is 98% of absolute design rotational speed. Stress and creep life distribution along the blade span at various operating conditions are shown in Figures 7-13. Figure 7 shows the stresses distribution along the span of the blade, showing the maximum stress occurring at the root of the blade. Since the stress distribution is effected by PCN alone, the σ_{sec} stress was not affected by temperature.



EFFECT OF AMBIENT TEMPERATURE ON CREEP LIFE

Figure 8 shows the effect of ambient temperature on HP blade creep life. The design reference point was taken as (TET=1378 K, T_a = 288.15 K) equivalent to Creep Factor = 1. It must be noted that the graph depicts a scenario where there is a constant power demand with increasing ambient temperature and consequent increase in firing temperature. As would be expected, a decrease in ambient temperature from its reference value of 0 °C to -5°C results in an improved Creep Factor, from 1.0 to 1.3(see Figure 8). This is due to the fact that at lower ambient temperature, compressor delivery temperature is lower, resulting in a reduced fuel flow requirement and thus a reduction in firing temperature, as well as improved cooling capability since the inlet cooling temperature is brought down (see Equation 3). Therefore, a reduction in Creep Factors is expected at higher ambient temperature. For that reason, it can be seen that the Creep Factor dropped almost linearly from its reference value to 0.22 when the ambient temperature is increased to 30°C. Further increase in the ambient temperature will definitely see further reduction in the blade's creep life.



Figure 8: Blade creep life at different ambient temperature

EFFECTS OF TET AND POWER DEMAND ON CREEP LIFE

It is important to note that for both cases, the engine TET was chosen as a handle. The effect of changes in TET was investigated from 1280 K to 1400 K in steps of 20 K. The reason for choosing this range is to show the effect on the blade's creep life of having high and lower TET value relative to its design point which is 1378 K. Furthermore, an ambient temperature of 288.15 K, and $\varepsilon = 0.55$ were taken as reference values in this investigation. The increase in the Creep Factor indicates an increase in the blade's creep life.

The variation of Creep Factor at various TET values and power settings has the detrimental effect of higher operating temperature for the clean engine, as can be seen in Figure 9. The Creep Factor is less that 1.0 when the TET was 1400K and increases to approximately 2.0 at 1340 K. A similar effect can be seen with the power demand variation. The reduction in TET from 1400 K to 1340 K will consequently reduce the power. Figure 9 shows that as the shaft power reduces, the blades creep life will increase due to similar reasons as discussed earlier. It is also shown in Figure 9 that by increasing power from 140 MW to 165 MW, with the associated increase in TET, the Creep Factor drops by 75%.



Figure 9: Blade creep life with different TET and power demand for clean engine

Figure 10 shows that a lower ambient temperature results in lower blade metal temperature. The drop in metal temperature will increase the blade's remaining life (see Figure 8). In Figure 10 it can also be seen that the stress does not contribute to a significant change in the blade's remaining life. This can be seen clearly as the maximum stress depicted in the figure remained unchanged during the investigation. This was because the centrifugal stress is a function of PCN which remained constant at 98% during this investigation.



Figure 10: Dev. Ambient Temp against Blade metal Temp and Stress

EFFECT OF COMPRESSOR DEGRADATION ON CREEP LIFE

Degradation in engine components, particularly the compressor, effects engine life. Degradation in engine compressor (implemented here as equal levels of loss in compressor efficiency and flow capacity) results in higher compressor delivery temperature, as it is shown in Figure 11. An increase in compressor delivery means that cooling air would be delivered to the turbine blade at a higher temperature for the degraded case. This would be reflected in a higher blade metal temperature as shown in Figure 12.



Figure 11: Engine degradation with compressor delivery temperature

The impact of engine degradation on blade metal temperature is shown in Figure 12. In this case, the firing temperature is maintained the same. A 5 K increase in blade metal temperature resulted in 20% reduction in Creep Factor.

The change in the metal temperature as shown in Figure 12 did not change so much (from 1024 K to 1029 K) since for these case studies TET was kept constant. Nevertheless the small changes are due to the changes in the compressor

delivery temperatures (see Figure 11) as degradation increases. The increase in the compressor delivery temperature is reflected as an increase in the coolant inlet temperature. This reduces the air cooling capability which consequently increases the blade metal temperature as shown in Figure 12.



Figure 12: Blade creep life and metal temperature at different engine degradation levels (T_a = 318 K).

Figure 13 shows that, the degraded engine's temperature has to be increased by 111 K (1489 K - 1378 K) above that of the clean engine to give the design point power output, substantially reducing the useful life of the engine. In other words, engine degradation results in a reduction in power output; therefore, if the engine is already being operated close to its base load, then for the degraded engine to meet the power demand, it has to be operated at higher TET. This case is illustrated also in Figure 13.





It is clear that over-firing of the engine reduces the life of the hot section component significantly and should be avoided if possible. Effective maintenance schemes or use of other engines with spare capacity is recommended in order to meet the required power demand.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has presented effects of design parameters and operating conditions on the HP turbine blade creep life. Clean and deteriorated engines were considered. In addition, the paper highlights how different operating conditions and design parameters can influence the blade's creep life.

A thermodynamic performance model of a stationary gas turbine engine was developed to simulate both design and offdesign conditions. The first stage turbine blade was measured in order to facilitate the estimation of creep life. Then the stress and temperature along the span of the blade was calculated to obtain the blade's remnant creep life.

With the material investigated, it was found that increasing the TET decreases the blade creep life along the span of the blade.

Blade metal temperature and ambient temperature have a strong influence on blade creep life, and these two factors will mainly determine the section of the blade with the lowest creep life. Emphasis should be given to the level of temperature and stress, and the locations of maxima along the blade, to better identify the location of minimum creep life. A deeper understanding of the relationship between operating conditions and design parameters will allow designers and users to obtain better trade-offs between different design options and maintenance decisions.

This analysis has strong economic implications because an understanding of creep life can lead to specialised maintenance in order to prolong the life of the hot gas path components. Depending on the way the engine is operated the maintenance costs will vary and the time before major overhaul will also be affected. Estimates of creep life can be used to avoid unplanned shut downs and loss of production.

NOMENCLATURE

A _{AnSec}	Blade section annulus area
A_{CS}	Blade section cross-section area
T_{Cin}	Inlet coolant temperature
T_g	Section gas temperature
d_{CG}	Distance between the rotation axis and the
	section Cg
d_{CGsec}	Distance between the section Cg to the
	respective section
t_f	Time to failure
σ_{CFSec}	Centrifugal stress at each blade section
CDP	Compressor delivery pressure
$C_{\rm F}$	Creep factor
CF _{sec}	Section's centrifugal forces
Cg	Centre of gravity
DT	Destructive test
G	Generator
GECOL	General Electrical Company of Libya
GT	Gas turbine
h	Height
HPT	High pressure turbine

NDT	Non-destructive test
PCN	Relative compressor speed
RTDF	Radial temperature distortion factor
T_a	Ambient temperature
T _b	Blade metal section temperature
TET	Turbine entry temperature
С	Parameter constant=20
LMP	Larson-Miller parameter
ε	Cooling effectiveness
ρ	Blade density
ω	Angular speed
OEM	Original equipment manufacturer
MW	Mega watt
DT	Destructive test
L _c	Calculated remnant life
L _{cRef}	Reference remnant life
Kg	Kilo Gramm
S	second
k	Kelvin
J	Joule
°C	Celsius
m	Meter
Т	Temperature
ISA	International Standard Atmosphere
MPa	Megapascal

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