Experimental Studies of Scalable Effects Warhead Technologies

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Abstract

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Current warfare scenarios like military operations on urban terrain (MOUT) or combat air support (CAS) missions demand a novel warhead capability providing sufficient effects to a specific target while minimizing risks of collateral damage at the same time. However, there is no warhead technology readily available fulfilling these needs, since nowadays munitions typically offer the full output mode and variable output warheads produce two distinct output modes only.

The dial-a-yield technology already suggested in a TDW patent filed in 1999 provides a radially adaptive warhead response by using two timely adjustable initiating devices: a deflagrator and a detonator. The detonative output of such a scalable effects warhead (SEW) and its associated fragment and blast effects can be continuously reduced from this full-output mode to a deflagrative output, i.e., low-output mode. In practice, this performance reduction can be realized by deflagrating the explosive and initiating the detonator after a specific, selectable time delay. This solution requires a stable deflagration that might be hard to achieve.

This technological approach was verified in a recent experimental study using generic cylindrical steel casings that were filled with a plastic-bonded, insensitive explosive. Results were gathered using witness plates as well as the synchro-streak technique (SST) of the ultra-high-speed rotating mirror camera Cordin 200 at a very slow mirror speed. The streak records
and framings provide valuable cylinder expansion data of detonative, sub-
detonative, and mixed processes.

The first experimental campaign consisted of tests for determining initia-
tion parameters for various deflagrator devices where the corresponding
warhead responses for these low outputs were documented. The holes in
the witness plates and the recovered fragments show a low hit density of
large fragments with a high L/D ratio that can be clearly distinguished
from a detonation response with a large number of small fragments. In-
dependently of the deflagrator device used, wall velocities recorded by the
rotating mirror camera can be found within a specific velocity range signif-
icantly lower than those caused by detonations.

During the main campaign, tests were conducted with charges defla-
grated through the deflagrator on top, while the detonator at the other end
was initiated after a given time delay in the microsecond regime. This time
delay mainly depends on the desired yield of the warhead, its dimensions,
and the explosive charge. The streak records and framings remarkably de-
pict the small wall expansion from the top end by the deflagrator and the
significantly higher wall expansion and velocities from the bottom caused
by a detonation wave. These overlayed reactions consequently result in
fragment numbers, sizes, and velocities ranging between the low-output
and high-output mode.

The unique experimental results provide a sound basis for additional
modeling and simulations as well as further experimental studies. This
successfully proven dial-a-yield technology may be used in future flexible
response blast / fragmentation warheads where the lethal radius can be
controlled and the collateral area minimized.
Figure 1: The detonative output can be continuously reduced to the low output mode as shown by these witness plates pictures.

Figure 2: Streak record with corresponding framings for a mixed process: the wall slowly expands after deflagrator initiation at the top end, before the wall velocity rapidly increases after the detonation wave has arrived in the streak slit plane. At the end of the recording, the casing begins to break and gaseous detonation products escape. The right figure clearly demonstrates the different wall expansions.

Figure 3: Cylinder expansion results and corresponding fragments. The different velocity regimes are related to specific initiator and time delay settings and, as a result, to different reaction levels observed.