

EFFECT OF HEAT TREATMENT ON THE MICROSTRUCTURE AND
MECHANICAL PROPERTIES OF LOW CARBON STEEL

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“I hereby declare that I have read this thesis and in my opinion this report is sufficient in terms of scope and quality for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering (Structure & Materials)”

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This report is done in order to fulfill the requirement of the Bachelor's degree of
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MAY 2013

DECLARATION

“I hereby declare that the work in this report is my own except for summaries and quotations which have been duly acknowledged.”

Signature : _____

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Date : 31 May 2013

To my lovely parent,
Mr. Samat bin Othman and Mrs. Fatimah binti Moen

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ABSTRACT

A study of heat treatment of low carbon steel has been carried out in order to investigate the effect on its microstructure and mechanical properties. The study consists of metallurgy and mechanical investigation before and after heat treatment process. Various treatments were performed which were annealing, normalizing, quenching and carburizing at temperature 860, 900 and 940 °C with 1 hour soaking time. Metallurgical investigation was conducted and it was observed that quenched sample form a martensite microstructure due to rapid cooling. As for normalizing and annealing process, it formed pearlite and ferrite microstructure due to slow cooling rate. Then, hardness test was carried out highest hardness value was achieved by carburizing (water quenched) sample with 88.38 HRA at 940 °C. This is because of the existence of fine grain size and also the effect of carbon diffusion from the process. Meanwhile annealing process gave a lowest hardness value with 33.38 HRA compared to as-received sample with 53.62 HRA due to larger grain size. The grain size was measured according to ASTM E112, and its proof that annealed sample gave a coarse grain size while the quenched sample prompted ultrafine grain size since it gave more than 14 grain size number. Besides, the finding also found that heating energy and cooling rate effects the grain size where it became larger as increased in temperature thus it decreased the hardness value.

ABSTRAK

Kajian berkaitan proses rawatan haba ke atas besi rendah karbon telah dijalankan dengan tujuan untuk mengkaji kesannya terhadap sifat mikrostruktur dan mekanikalnya. Pembelajaran ini meliputi kajian berdasarkan metalurgi dan sifat mekanikalnya sebelum dan selepas proses rawatan haba. Pelbagai proses rawatan haba telah dijalankan seperti penyepuhlindapan, pengnormalan, lindapkejutan dan pengkarbonan pada suhu 860, 900 and 940 °C selama 1 jam. Siasatan logam telah dijalankan telah didapati bahawa sampel lindapkejutan membentuk mikrostruktur martensit kerana penyejukan yang cepat. Untuk proses pengnormalan dan penyepuhlindapan, ia membentuk mikrostruktur feritte dan pearlite kerana kesan daripada proses penyejukan yang lambat. Kemudian, ujian kekerasan telah dijalankan dan hasilnya menunjukkan nilai kekerasan yang tinggi untuk pengkarbonan (lindapkejutan) sampel dengan 88.38 HRA pada 940 °C. Ini adalah kerana kewujudan saiz butiran yang halus dan juga kesan penyerapan karbon daripada proses tersebut. Sementara itu, proses penyepuhlindapan memberikan nilai kekerasan paling rendah dengan 33.38 HRA berbanding sampel tanpa rawatan dengan 53.62 HRA kerana memiliki saiz butiran yang lebih besar. Saiz butiran ini diukur mengikut ASTM E112, dan ia terbukti bahawa sampel penyepuhlindapan memberikan saiz atom yang kasar manakala sampel lindapkejutan mendorong saiz butiran yang halus kerana ia memiliki lebih 14 nombor saiz butiran. Selain itu, kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa tenaga pemanasan dan kesan kadar penyejukan membentuk saiz butiran yang lebih besar lalu memberi kesan kepada penurunan nilai kekerasan.

CONTENT

CHAPTER	TOPIC	PAGE
	DECLARATION	ii
	DEDICATION	iii
	ACKNOWLEDGMENT	iv
	ABSTRACT	v
	ABSTRAK	vi
	CONTENT	vii
	LIST OF FIGURE	xi
	LIST OF TABLE	xiv
	LIST OF SYMBOLS	xv
	LIST OF ABBREVIATION	xvi
	LIST OF APPENDICES	xvii
1	INTRODUCTION	1
	1.1 BACKGROUND	1
	1.2 OBJECTIVE	2
	1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT	2
	1.4 SCOPE OF STUDY	3
2	LITERATURE REVIEW	4
	2.1 METALLURGY	4
	2.1.1 Introduction to Steels	4
	2.1.2 Low Carbon Steels	5

2.1.2.1	Composition of Low-Carbon Steel	6
2.1.2.2	Mechanical properties	7
2.2	PHASE DIAGRAM	7
2.2.1	Iron-Iron Carbide Phase Diagram	7
2.3	PHASE TRANSFORMATION	9
2.3.1	Pearlite	9
2.3.2	Martensite	10
2.3.3	Ferrite	10
2.3.4	Bainite	11
2.3.5	Cementite	12
2.3.6	Austenite	12
2.4	ISOTHERMAL TRANSFORMATION DIAGRAM	12
2.5	HEAT TREATMENT	13
2.5.1	Annealing	14
2.5.1.1	Comparison between Untreated and Annealed Microstructure	14
2.5.1.2	Effect of Annealing Temperature to the Microstructure of Low Carbon Steel	15
2.5.1.3	Effect of Cooling Method for Annealed Low Carbon Steel	16
2.5.1.4	Effects of Annealing Process to the Hardness Value of Low Carbon Steel	17
2.5.1.5	Effects of Annealing Process to Mechanical Properties of the Treated and Untreated Samples	18
2.5.2	Normalizing	19
2.5.2.1	Microstructure of normalizing process	20
2.5.3	Tempering	21
2.5.4	Quenching	21
2.5.4.1	Effects of Quenching Medium to the Microstructure of Low Carbon Steel	22

	2.5.4.2	Effects of Quenching Process to the Hardness Value of Low Carbon Steel	23
	2.5.4.3	Effect of Carbon Content to the Quenched Sample of Low Carbon Steel	25
	2.5.5	Carburizing	25
	2.5.5.1	Effects of Carburizing Process to Untempered and Tempered Sample of Low Carbon Steel	26
	2.5.5.2	Effects of Carburizing to the Hardness of Low Carbon Steel	27
	2.6	SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW	29
3		RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	30
	3.1	SAMPLE PREPARATION	30
	3.1.1	Material Selection	31
	3.1.2	Specimen for Hardness Test	31
	3.2	HEAT TREATMENT METHOD	32
	3.2.1	Annealing Process	32
	3.2.2	Normalizing Process	33
	3.2.3	Quenching Process	33
	3.2.4	Carburizing Process	34
	3.3	METALLURGICAL PROCESS	36
	3.3.1	Mounting	36
	3.3.2	Grinding	37
	3.3.3	Polishing	37
	3.3.4	Cleaning	38
	3.3.5	Etching	39
	3.3.6	Blowing	39
	3.4	MICROSTRUCTURE OBSERVATION	40
	3.4.1	Composition Analysis	40
	3.4.2	Microstructure Analysis	40
	3.5	MECHANICAL TESTING	41
	3.5.1	Hardness Test	41

4	RESULT AND DISCUSSION	43
4.1	ELEMENTS AND COMPOSITION ANALYSIS	43
4.2	MICROSTRUCURE INVESTIGATION	44
4.2.1	As- received	44
4.2.2	Annealing	45
4.2.3	Normalizing	46
4.2.4	Quenching	48
4.2.5	Carburizing (Water quenching)	49
4.2.6	Carburizing (Air cooled)	50
4.3	GRAIN SIZE ANALYSIS	52
4.4	HARDNESS TEST ANALYSIS	57
4.4.1	Average Hardness Value	57
4.4.2	Comparison of Hardness Value Based on Temperature	59
4.5	SUMMARY OF MICROSTRUCTURES AND MECHANICAL PROPERTIES OF HEAT TREATED LOW CARBON STEEL	61
5	CONCLUSION AND RECEMMENDATION	62
5.1	CONCLUSION	62
5.2	RECOMMENDATION	63
	REFERENCES	64
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	67
	APPENDICES	68

LIST OF FIGURES

QTY	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	Classification Scheme for Various Ferrous Alloys	5
2.2	The Iron-Iron Carbide Phase Diagram.	8
2.3	Pearlite Microstructure	9
2.4	Martensite Microstructure	10
2.5	Ferrite Microstructure	11
2.6	Bainite Microstructure	11
2.7	Isothermal Transformation Diagram for An Iron-Carbon Alloy of Eutectoid Composition	13
2.8	Microstructure of NST 37-2 Carbon Steel (X400)	15
2.9	Photomicroscan of Carbon Steel C45 Before and After Annealing at 200x	16
2.10	SEM Micrographs of Heat Treated Specimen at 780°C For 30 Minutes	17
2.11	Effect of Annealing Temperature on the Micro Hardness of Low Carbon Steel	17
2.12	Hardness of Treated and Untreated Samples of NST 37-2 Steel	18
2.13	The Iron-Iron Carbide Phase Diagram in the Vicinity of Eutectoid.	20
2.14	Optical micrograph 1000x for sample after normalizing process	20
2.15	Microstructure of normalized NST 37-2 steel (x400)	21
2.16	The Microstructure of AISI 1020	22

2.17	Hardness Results of Samples Quenched at 930°C in Different Quenchants	23
2.18	Hardness Responses of Quenched and Tempered Samples with Carburizing Temperature.	26
2.19	Hardness Responses of Quenched and Untempered Samples with Carburizing Temperature.	26
2.20	The Effect of Carburizing Temperature on the Case Hardness of the Samples	28
2.21	The Effect of Carburizing Temperature on the Core Hardness of the Samples	28
3.1	Research Methodology Chart	30
3.2	Bendsaw Machine	31
3.3	Specimen for Hardness Test	31
3.4	Schematic Temperature Versus Time for Annealing Process	32
3.5	Schematic Temperature Versus Time for Normalizing Process	33
3.6	Schematic Temperature Versus Time for Quenching Process	34
3.7	Schematic Temperature Versus Time for Carburizing Process	35
3.8	Automatic Mounting Press Machine	36
3.9	Mounted Specimen	36
3.10	Hand Grinder	37
3.11	Grinding and Polishing Machine.	38
3.12	Ultrasonic Bath	38
3.13	Nital Solution for Low Carbon Steel.	39
3.14	Hand Blower	39
3.15	Scanning Electron Microscope	40
3.16	Axioscope Zeiss Optical Microscope	41
3.17	Hardness Tester	42
4.1	EDX analysis using Scanning Electron Microscope	43
4.2	Microstructure for as-received material	44

4.3	Microstructure for annealing process for 1 hour	46
4.4	Microstructure for normalizing process for 1 hour	47
4.5	Microstructure for quenching process for 1 hour	48
4.6	Microstructure for carburizing process (water quenched) for 1 hour	50
4.7	Microstructure for carburizing process (Air cooled) for 1 hour	51
4.8	Normalized sample at 900 °C for 1 hour	52
4.9	Grain size relationships for uniform, randomly oriented and equiaxed grains	53
4.10	Graph temperature against ASTM grain size number for annealing, normalizing and quenching process	55
4.11	Graph temperature against ASTM grain size number for each carburizing process	56
4.12	Graph temperature against ASTM grain size number for each treated sample.	56
4.13	Graph of temperature (°C) against average hardness value (HRA)	58
4.14	Comparison hardness value for each process against temperature	60

LIST OF TABLES

QTY	TOPIC	PAGE
2.1	Chemical composition for AISI 1020 low-carbon steel	6
2.2	Mechanical characteristics of low carbon steel	7
2.3	Mechanical Properties of heat treated and untreated NST 37-2 steel	19
2.4	Hardness testing results of as received, as quenched and tempered specimens	24
2.5	The microhardness values after various heated treatments of steels	25
3.1	Annealing process details	32
3.2	Normalizing process details	33
3.3	Quenching process details	34
3.4	Carburizing process details	35
4.1	Composition of low carbon steel	44
4.2	Mean value for length and number of intercepts for normalized sample	53
4.3	ASTM grain size number, G for each sample	54
4.4	The relative size according to ASTM grain size number	54
4.5	Average hardness result for as-received heat treated samples.	57
4.6	The relationship of microstructures and mechanical properties of low carbon steel	61

LIST OF SYMBOLS

wt%	=	Weight percent
C	=	Carbon
Fe ₃ C	=	Iron Carbide
°C	=	Degree Celsius
M _S	=	Martensite Start
g	=	Gram
γ	=	Gamma (austenite)
δ	=	Delta (ferrite)
cm ³	=	Volume
N	=	Newton
J	=	Joule
mm	=	Millimeter
A _{cm}	=	Above critical temperature
MPa	=	Mega Pascal
RPM	=	Revolution per minutes
HV	=	Vickers's hardness unit
HRA	=	Rockwell hardness unit
HRB	=	Rockwell hardness unit
HRC	=	Rockwell hardness unit
HRF	=	Rockwell hardness unit
HB	=	Brinell hardness unit

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

AISI	=	American Iron and Steel Institute
ASTM	=	American Society for Testing and Materials
CNC	=	Computer Numerical Control
BCC	=	Body centered cubic
FCC	=	Face centered cubic
EDX	=	Energy Dispersive X-Ray
et. al.	=	et alii (and others)
etc.	=	Et cetera
NST	=	National Standard Thread
SEM	=	Scanning Electron Microscope
UTS	=	Universal Tensile Test

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX	TITLE	PAGE
A	Gantt chart for PSM	68
B	Research Methodology Flow Chart for PSM I and PSM II	69
C	EDX analysis using SEM	70
D	Hardness value	72

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Heat treatment is a combination of heating and cooling that applied to a particular metal in order to produce a certain microstructure and obtain the desired mechanical properties such as hardness, yield strength, percent elongation, Young's modulus, etc. Microstructures of steels are strongly related to its mechanical properties. It is an important process especially in manufacturing machine parts and tools. Heat treatment process such as annealing, normalizing, hardening and tempering are the most important process that often employed to modify the microstructure and mechanical properties of engineering materials particularly steels.

Steel is basically an iron alloyed with carbon and other alloying elements. It can be heat treated to a wide range of strengths, toughness and ductility. Carbon is the most important alloying element in order to improve the mechanical properties of steel. Most heat treatments of steel are based primarily on controlling the distribution of carbon. Furthermore, steel offers good formability due to its low yield strength, ease in fabrication, good strength, toughness, nice weldability and it is relatively cheaper compare to other alloy.

1.2 OBJECTIVE

The objectives of this study are:

- a) To identify the effect of various type of heat treatment on the microstructure of low carbon steel.
- b) To identify mechanical properties of low carbon steel before and after heat treatment process.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many industrial applications such as car bodies require steel with excellent properties. The steel especially low carbon steel has a good strength and does not end up brittle when it comes out of the press. Additionally, when low carbon steel car bodies get into an accident, it can bend, folds and deforms more than other steel. In addition it also helps to absorb the energy of the crash.

However, this low carbon steel still needs some improvement before comes out as a product. Hence, the effects of heat treatment on the microstructure and mechanical properties of low carbon steel need to be studied in order choose the best heat treatment method to improve its properties in order to produce a high quality of car bodies.

In order to overcome the problem of low carbon steel, heat treatment techniques which are annealing, carburizing and quenching were chosen to improve its properties.

1.4 SCOPE OF STUDY

The scopes of the research are:

- a) To conduct various process of heat treatment on the material which are carburizing, annealing, normalizing and quenching.
- b) Metallurgical investigation and material characterization of low carbon steel before and after heat treatment process.
- c) To conduct hardness test on the material before and after heat treatment process.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 METALLURGY

Metallurgy is a field of materials science and materials engineering that studies the physical and chemical behavior of metallic elements, intermetallic compounds and its mixtures, which known as alloys. Besides, it is also a technology of metals where science is applied to their practical use.

2.1.1 Introduction to Steels

Steels are alloy of iron and carbon that normally have less than 1.0 wt% content of carbon. It may contain with or without other alloying elements that have different compositions and/or heat treatment (Callister et al., 2008). American Iron and Steel Institute has defined carbon steel as steel is considered to be carbon steel when no minimum content is specified or required for chromium, cobalt, molybdenum, nickel, titanium or any other element to be added to obtain a desired alloying effect; when the specified minimum for copper does not exceed 0.40%; or when the maximum content specified for any of the following elements does not exceed the percentages noted: manganese 1.65, silicon 0.60, copper 0.60 (Key to metal, 2001).

Steels may be broadly classified into two types; carbon and alloy where some of common carbon steels are classified according to its carbon concentration as

shown in Figure 2.1. They are frequently called low, medium and high carbon types. Besides, subclasses also exist within each group based on concentration of other alloying elements such as manganese, silicon, phosphorus and sulfur.

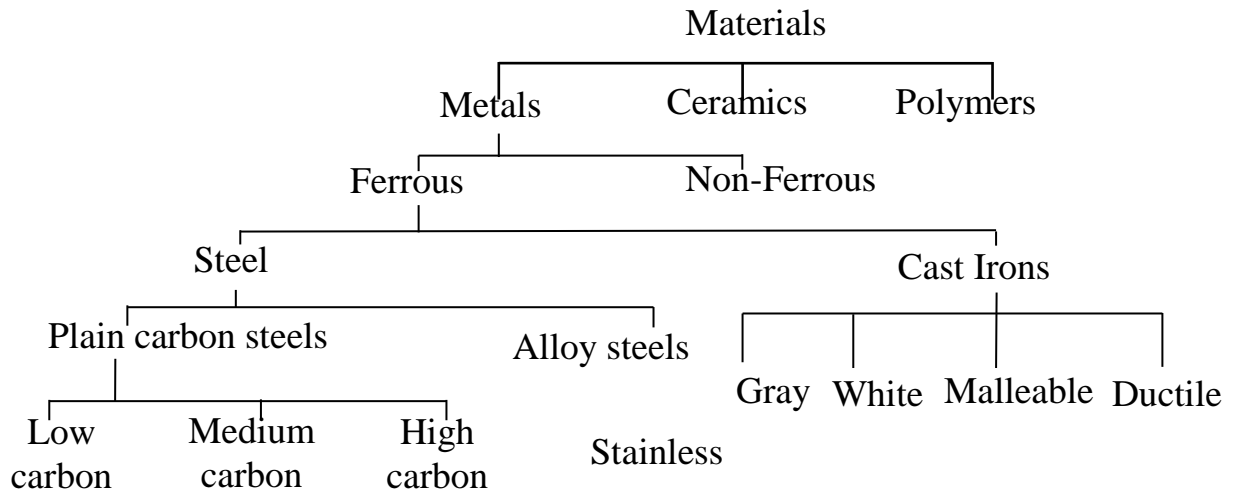


Figure 2.1: Classification scheme for various ferrous alloys

(Source: ecourses.vtu.ac.in)

2.1.2 Low Carbon Steels

Low carbon steel is widely used and produced in all applications because it is cheaper than other steel. Normally it contains less than 0.25 wt% and divided into two groups plain carbon steels and high-strength, low alloy (HSLA) (Jaypuria, 2008). The microstructure of low-carbon steel consists of ferrite and pearlite. As a consequence, these alloys are soft, malleable and weak but have a good ductility and toughness. Furthermore, plain low-carbon steel also machinable, weldable and low cost to produce. Generally plain low-carbon steels used in automobile body components, structural shapes and sheets that are used to form tin cans, wire, pipelines and etc.

For HSLA, they contain other alloying elements such as nickel. Copper, molybdenum and vanadium in combined concentration as high as 10 wt%. Thus, it