



(12) **DEMANDE DE BREVET CANADIEN**
CANADIAN PATENT APPLICATION
(13) **A1**

(86) Date de dépôt PCT/PCT Filing Date: 2016/10/14	(51) Cl.Int./Int.Cl. <i>H01B 1/02</i> (2006.01), <i>C21D 8/06</i> (2006.01), <i>C22F 1/04</i> (2006.01)
(87) Date publication PCT/PCT Publication Date: 2017/04/20	
(85) Entrée phase nationale/National Entry: 2018/02/28	(71) Demandeurs/Applicants: GENERAL CABLE TECHNOLOGIES CORPORATION, US; NANOAL LLC, US
(86) N° demande PCT/PCT Application No.: US 2016/057142	
(87) N° publication PCT/PCT Publication No.: 2017/066638	(72) Inventeurs/Inventors: SIRIPURAPU, SRINIVAS, US; MUOJEKWU, CORNELIUS A., US; SEKUNDA, JANUSZ STANISLAW, US; BAKER, RICHARD STEPHEN, US; DUER, NICHOLAS JOHN, US; VO, NHON Q., US
(30) Priorité/Priority: 2015/10/14 (US62/241,543)	(74) Agent: PARLEE MCLAWS LLP

(54) Titre : CABLES ET FILS A ELEMENTS CONDUCTEURS FORMES A PARTIR D'ALLIAGES AMELIORES D'ALUMINIUM-ZIRCONIUM
(54) Title: CABLES AND WIRES HAVING CONDUCTIVE ELEMENTS FORMED FROM IMPROVED ALUMINUM-ZIRCONIUM ALLOYS

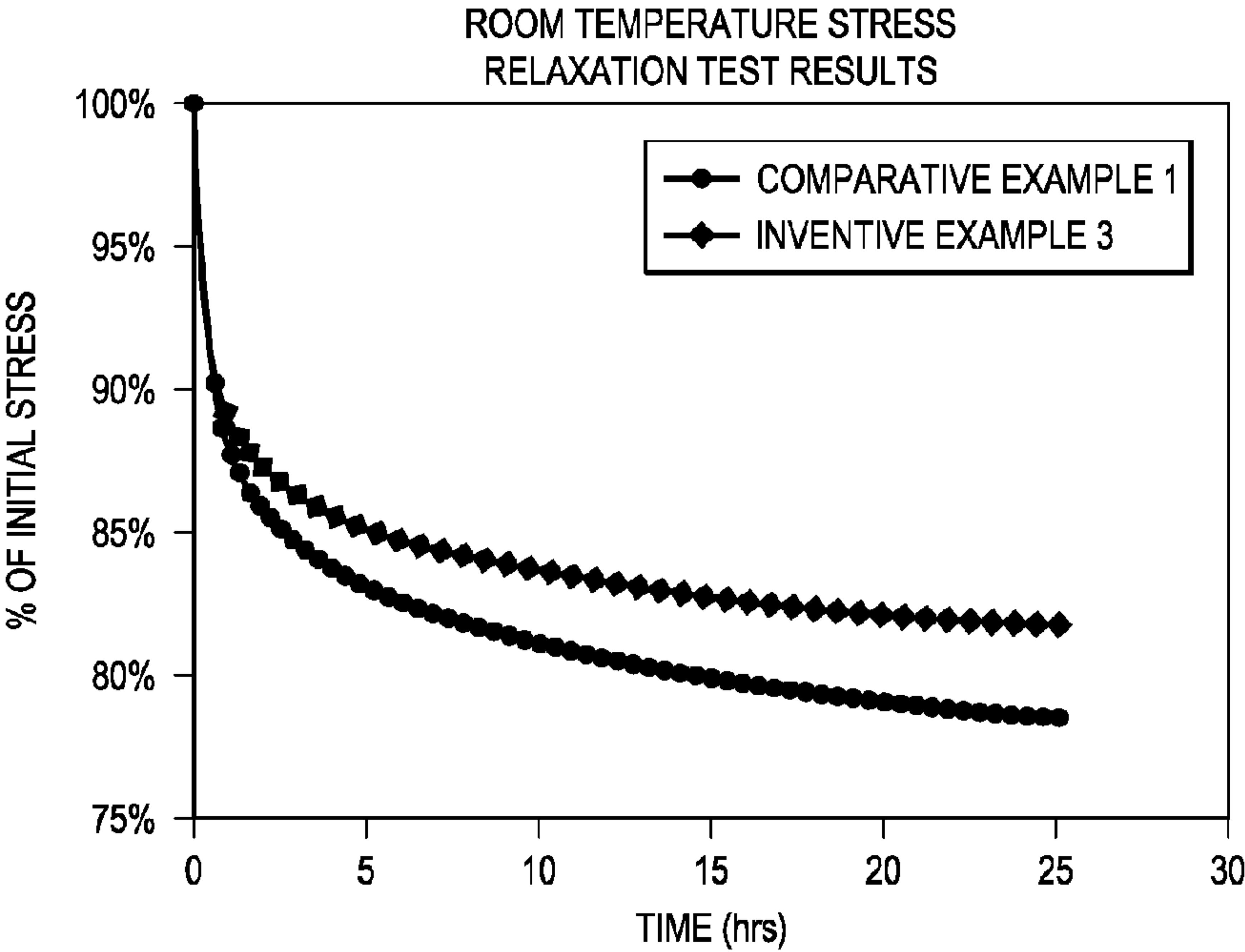


FIG. 1

(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**
A conductive element of a cable or a wire is formed of an improved aluminum-zirconium alloy. The aluminum-zirconium alloy further includes an inoculant. The aluminum-zirconium alloy exhibits excellent ultimate tensile strength values and resistance to heat. Bonding wires formed from an improved aluminum-zirconium alloy exhibiting certain ultimate tensile strength values, fatigue resistance and/or creep rates are also described. Methods of forming cables and wires are also further disclosed.

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property
Organization
International Bureau(10) International Publication Number
WO 2017/066638 A1(43) International Publication Date
20 April 2017 (20.04.2017)

(51) International Patent Classification:

H01B 1/02 (2006.01) **C21D 8/06** (2006.01)
C22F 1/04 (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:

PCT/US2016/057142

(22) International Filing Date:

14 October 2016 (14.10.2016)

(25) Filing Language:

English

(26) Publication Language:

English

(30) Priority Data:

62/241,543 14 October 2015 (14.10.2015) US

(71) Applicants: **GENERAL CABLE TECHNOLOGIES CORPORATION** [US/US]; 4 Tesseneer Drive, Highland Heights, KY 41076 (US). **NANOAL, LLC** [US/US]; 8025 Lamon Avenue, Suite 446, Skokie, IL 60077 (US).(72) Inventors: **SIRIPURAPU, Srinivas**; c/o Legal Dept., General Cable Technologies Corporation, 4 Tesseneer Drive, Highland Heights, KY 41076 (US). **MUOJEKWU, Cornelius, A.**; c/o Legal Dept., General Cable Technologies Corporation, 4 Tesseneer Drive, Highland Heights, KY 41076 (US). **SEKUNDA, Janusz, Stanislaw**; c/o Legal Dept., General Cable Technologies Corporation, 4 Tesseneer Drive, Highland Heights, KY 41076 (US).**BAKER, Richard, Stephen**; c/o Legal Dept., General Cable Technologies Corporation, 4 Tesseneer Drive, Highland Heights, KY 41076 (US). **DUER, Nicholas, John**; c/o Legal Dept., General Cable Technologies Corporation, 4 Tesseneer Drive, Highland Heights, KY 41076 (US). **VO, Nhon, Q.**; c/o Nanoal, LLC, 8025 Lamon Avenue, Suite 446, Skokie, IL 60077 (US).(74) Agents: **KUHNELL, Clayton, L.** et al.; Ulmer & Berne LLP, 600 Vine Street, Suite 2800, Cincinnati, OH 45202 (US).(81) Designated States (*unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available*): AE, AG, AL, AM, AO, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BN, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CL, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DJ, DK, DM, DO, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IR, IS, JP, KE, KG, KN, KP, KR, KW, KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PA, PE, PG, PH, PL, PT, QA, RO, RS, RU, RW, SA, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, ST, SV, SY, TH, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.(84) Designated States (*unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available*): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LR, LS, MW, MZ, NA, RW, SD, SL, ST, SZ,

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(54) Title: CABLES AND WIRES HAVING CONDUCTIVE ELEMENTS FORMED FROM IMPROVED ALUMINUM-ZIRCONIUM ALLOYS

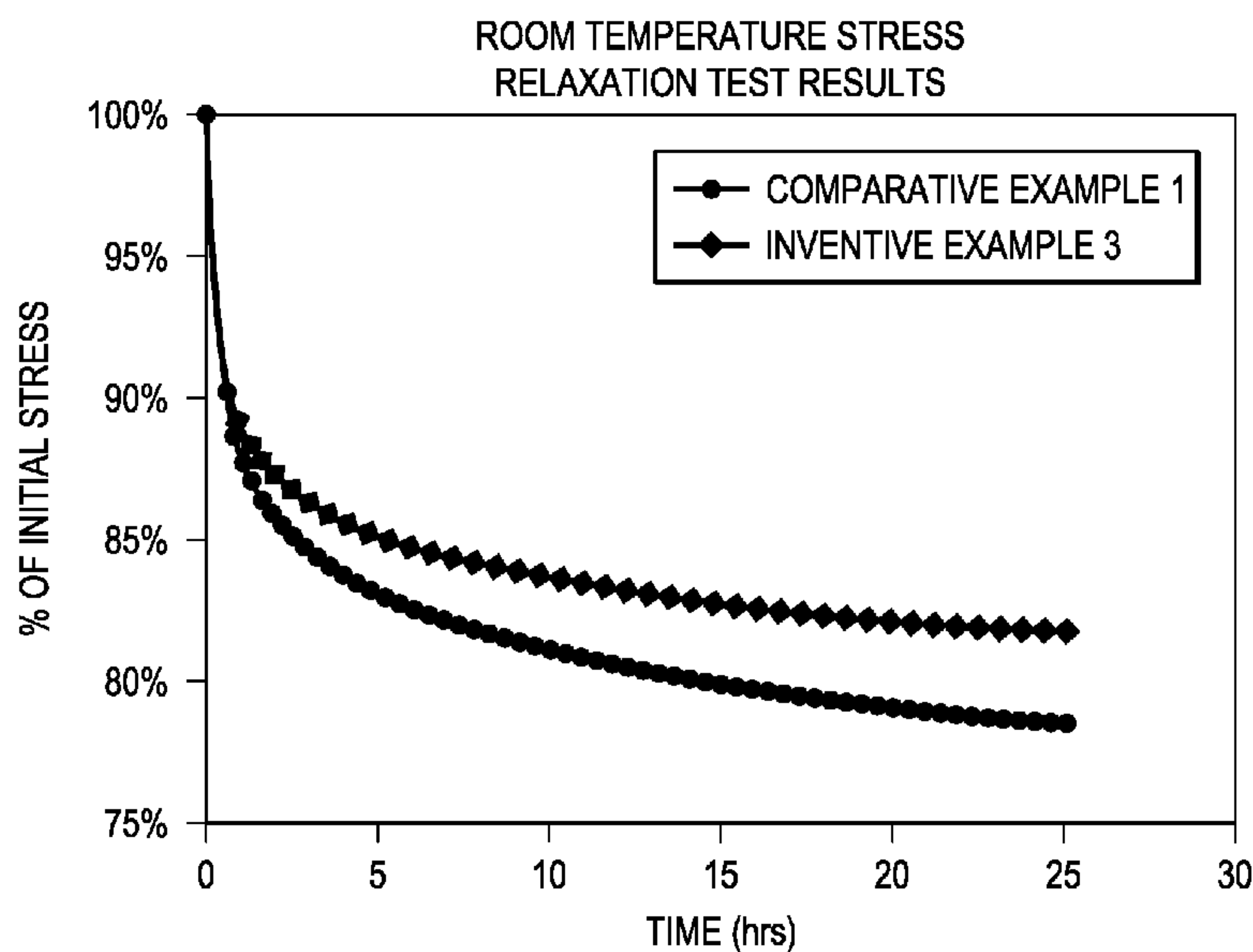


FIG. 1

(57) Abstract: A conductive element of a cable or a wire is formed of an improved aluminum-zirconium alloy. The aluminum-zirconium alloy further includes an inoculant. The aluminum-zirconium alloy exhibits excellent ultimate tensile strength values and resistance to heat. Bonding wires formed from an improved aluminum-zirconium alloy exhibiting certain ultimate tensile strength values, fatigue resistance and/or creep rates are also described. Methods of forming cables and wires are also further disclosed.

WO 2017/066638 A1

TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, RU, TJ, TM), European (AL, AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK, SM, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, KM, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

— as to the applicant's entitlement to claim the priority of the earlier application (Rule 4.17(iii))

Published:

— with international search report (Art. 21(3))

Declarations under Rule 4.17:

— as to applicant's entitlement to apply for and be granted a patent (Rule 4.17(ii))

CABLES AND WIRES HAVING CONDUCTIVE ELEMENTS FORMED FROM IMPROVED ALUMINUM-ZIRCONIUM ALLOYS

REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] The present application claims the priority of U.S. provisional application Serial No. 62/241,543, entitled CABLES HAVING CONDUCTIVE ELEMENTS FORMED FROM IMPROVED ALUMINUM-ZIRCONIUM ALLOYS, filed October 14, 2015, and hereby incorporates the same application herein by reference in its entirety.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present disclosure generally relates to the construction of cables and wires that include conductive elements formed from an improved aluminum-zirconium alloy. The aluminum-zirconium alloy exhibits improved electrical and mechanical properties.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Conductive elements for power cables and wires can be selected based on the intended use of the cable or wire in conjunction with the necessary electrical and mechanical properties required to achieve the intended use of the cable or wire. For example, it is known to use aluminum or aluminum alloys as the conductive element in cable applications that require relatively light weight cables as a consequence of aluminum's relatively low density and generally satisfactory electrical and mechanical properties. However, aluminum and certain aluminum alloys suffer from various detriments that impair their use as a conductive element in certain cabling applications. For example, certain aluminum conductors can suffer from time consuming and energy-intensive processing steps and can exhibit poor electrical or mechanical properties when used as a conductive element or when used at elevated temperatures. It would therefore be desirable to create an improved aluminum alloy that is easier to produce while also offering improved electrical and mechanical properties.

SUMMARY

[0004] In accordance with one embodiment, a bonding wire is formed from an aluminum-zirconium alloy. The aluminum-zirconium alloy includes an inoculant. The bonding wire

exhibits at least two of an ultimate tensile strength value after heat aging for 1 hour at 280 °C of about 90% or more of the unaged ultimate tensile strength value when tested in accordance to ASTM B941, resistance to fatigue failure for at least about 10^6 cycles at 85 MPa of applied stress when tested in accordance with ASTM E466, and a creep rate of about 500% an hour or less at 50 MPa of applied stress and a temperature of about 185 °C when tested in accordance to ASTM E139.

[0005] In accordance with another embodiment, a cable includes at least one conductive element formed from an aluminum-zirconium alloy. The aluminum-zirconium alloy further includes an inoculant. The at least one conductive element has an ultimate tensile strength of about 120 MPa or more after heat aging for 48 hours at 400 °C and exhibits a stress relaxation time to reach about 85% of an initial stress that is about 2 times longer in duration than a similar aluminum-zirconium alloy formed without an inoculant when measured in accordance to ASTM E328.

[0006] In accordance with another embodiment, a method of making a cable includes continuously casting an as-cast shape from an aluminum-zirconium alloy, hot rolling the as-cast shape to form a redraw rod, drawing the redraw rod into a wire, and annealing the wire to form a cable. The aluminum-zirconium alloy further includes an inoculant. The conductive element exhibits at least two of an ultimate tensile strength value after heat aging for 1 hour at 280 °C of about 90% or more of the unaged ultimate tensile strength value when tested in accordance to ASTM B941, resistance to fatigue failure for at least about 10^6 cycles at 85 MPa of applied stress when tested in accordance with ASTM E466, and a creep rate of about 50% an hour or less at 50 MPa of applied stress and a temperature of about 185 °C when tested in accordance to ASTM E139.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] FIG. 1 depicts a graph illustrating the room temperature stress relaxation times of an improved aluminum-zirconium alloy according to one embodiment, and the room temperature stress relaxation time of a conventional aluminum-zirconium alloy.

[0008] FIG. 2 depicts a graph illustrating the room temperature fatigue properties of an improved aluminum-zirconium alloy according to one embodiment, and the room temperature fatigue properties of a conventional 8000 series aluminum-zirconium alloy.

[0009] FIG. 3 depicts a graph illustrating the results of a 20 mil (0.508 mm) shear test demonstrating the bonding performance of an improved aluminum-zirconium alloy according to one embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0010] Aluminum alloys exhibiting improved conductivity and mechanical properties at elevated temperatures can provide numerous benefits when used as conductive elements in cables and wires. In certain embodiments, an improved aluminum alloy exhibiting such features can be an aluminum-zirconium alloy including an inoculant that increases the diffusivity of zirconium in the aluminum. According to certain embodiments, examples of suitable inoculants can include any metal or metalloid that lowers the activation energy required for diffusion in an α -Al matrix as compared to the activation energy required for diffusion in an α -Al matrix free of an inoculant. Non-limiting examples of such inoculants can include Group 3A, Group 4A and Group 5A metals and metalloids as well as zinc. For example, suitable inoculants that can increase the kinetics of zirconium diffusion in an α -Al matrix can include tin, indium, antimony, magnesium, zinc, gallium, germanium, and, in combination with other inoculants, silicon, in certain embodiments.

[0011] Without being bound by theory, it is believed the inclusion of a suitable inoculant in an aluminum-zirconium alloy increases the diffusivity of the zirconium in the aluminum alloy which causes both supersaturation of zirconium and a decrease in the precipitation temperature of zirconium. As can be appreciated, such diffusivity can allow for precipitation of a large density of relatively small precipitates using lower temperatures and/or time than a similar aluminum-zirconium alloy without such an inoculant. For example, heat aging of an aluminum-zirconium alloy including an inoculant can be performed at lower temperatures for constant time heat aging than a similar aluminum-zirconium alloy free of an inoculant (*e.g.*, at temperatures about 45 °C lower in certain embodiments) and/or for a shorter duration than a similar aluminum-zirconium alloy free of an inoculant for constant temperature heat aging (*e.g.*, for

durations about 50 hours shorter according to certain embodiments). As can be appreciated, an aluminum-zirconium alloy with a larger quantity of smaller precipitates can exhibit greater strength than a similar alloy with larger precipitates. In certain embodiments, the nanoscale precipitates can include Al_3Zr precipitates having an L12-structure in an $\alpha\text{-Al}$ (f.c.c.) matrix as well as Al-Zr-Inoculant precipitates.

[0012] In certain embodiments, an improved aluminum alloy can be formed predominantly of aluminum (e.g., about 99% by weight aluminum or more), and small quantities of zirconium and an inoculant. For example, suitable aluminum alloys can include, by weight percentage, about 0.1% to about 0.4% zirconium, and about 0.01% to about 0.2% of an inoculant, with the remainder of the aluminum alloy being aluminum and trace quantities of additional elements. Such trace elements can form about 1% or less of the aluminum alloy. For example, one or more of iron, silicon, copper, manganese, magnesium, chromium, zinc, titanium, boron, gallium, vanadium, nickel, antimony, scandium or other elements can be found, or included, in certain aluminum alloys. In certain embodiments including such other elements or impurities, iron can be included at about 0.3% to about 0.7%, by weight percentage; silicon can be included at about 0.06% or less, by weight percentage; copper can be included at about 0.007% or less, by weight percentage; manganese can be included at about 0.005% or less, by weight percentage; magnesium can be included at about 0.015% or less, by weight percentage; chromium can be included at about 0.002% or less, by weight percentage; zinc can be included at about 0.04% or less, by weight percentage; titanium can be included at about 0.008% or less, by weight percentage; boron can be included at about 0.001% to about 0.006% by weight percentage; gallium can be included at about 0.03% or less, by weight percentage; vanadium can be included at about 0.004% or less, by weight percentage; nickel can be included at about 0.03% or less by weight percentage; and any other trace elements can be included at about 0.03% or less individually or at about 0.1% collectively, by weight percentage. Aluminum, zirconium, and an inoculant can constitute the remainder of such aluminum alloys.

[0013] In comparison to other known aluminum-zirconium alloys having nanoscale aluminum-zirconium precipitates, the inclusion of an inoculant into the aluminum-zirconium alloy can allow for a reduction in the duration of various heat aging steps used to promote precipitation. For example, the inclusion of tin as an inoculant in an aluminum-zirconium alloy can allow for

heat aging steps to have a total duration of about 24 hours or less in certain embodiments, about 12 hours or less in certain embodiments; or about 8 hours or less in certain embodiments. Additionally, the inclusion of an inoculant into an aluminum-zirconium alloy can also promote the formation of precipitates having a smaller diameter than comparable precipitates formed on aluminum-zirconium alloys formed without such an inoculant. Other benefits can also be observed due to the inclusion of an inoculant. For example, wire samples formed of an aluminum-zirconium alloy free of an inoculant can become progressively weaker over the duration of a heat aging protocol. Similar samples including such an inoculant can conversely become stronger over the duration of a heat aging protocol. This difference in strength between the two samples is believed to have been caused by the inability of the inoculant-free aluminum-zirconium alloy sample to produce precipitates as small as the precipitates found in the aluminum alloy having zirconium and an inoculant.

[0014] The nanoscale precipitates of an aluminum alloy including both zirconium and an inoculant can have an average diameter of about 100 nanometers (“nm”) or less, in certain embodiments; an average diameter of about 20 nm or less, in certain embodiments; an average diameter of about 10 nm or less, in certain embodiments; or an average diameter of about 3 nm to about 7 nm in certain embodiments. As can be appreciated, such average diameters can offer a number of benefits over aluminum alloys having larger precipitates. For example, smaller precipitates can lead to improved strength and heat/creep resistance while maintaining good electrical properties and ductility. These properties can also be enhanced by a high density of precipitates. In certain embodiments, the nanoscale precipitates can be found in a high number density on the aluminum-zirconium alloy and can have, for example, a number density of about 10^{21} nanoscale precipitates per m^3 , or greater.

[0015] In certain embodiments, an improved aluminum-zirconium alloy can include iron. Iron, in suitable quantities, can form beneficial microscale channels on the alloy. For example, about 0.3% to about 0.7% iron can cause the formation of microscale channels in an aluminum-zirconium alloy including an inoculant. Such microscale channels, in combination with the nanoscale precipitates, can form beneficial hierarchical microstructures.

[0016] For example, $\text{Al}_{99\%}\text{Fe}_{0.55\%}\text{Zr}_{0.34\%}\text{Sn}_{0.1\%}$ exhibits a hierarchical microstructure that is highly resistant to creep as a result of Al-Fe intermetallic channels and regions of both high and low density Al-Zr-Sn nanoscale precipitates. Such microstructures defined by the plurality of nanoscale precipitates and channels can allow the aluminum-zirconium alloy to maintain strength over longer periods of time, even at relatively higher temperatures. For example, an aluminum-zirconium alloy cable formed with such microstructures heated to 280 °C for about 1 hour can retain a tensile strength greater than 90% of the original temperature tensile strength before the heat resistance testing when measured in accordance to ASTM B941.

[0017] As can be appreciated, the formation of microstructures with nanoscale precipitates on an aluminum-zirconium alloy can also permit the aluminum-zirconium alloy to exhibit various improvements to its mechanical and electrical properties. For example, an aluminum-zirconium alloy including small quantities of an inoculant can, in certain embodiments, exhibit an elongation at break greater than 12% or greater than 14.5%, an ultimate tensile strength (“UTS”), after heat aging at about 450 °C for 48 hours, of about 140 MPa or more in certain embodiments, about 130 MPa or more in certain embodiments, and of about 120 MPa or more in certain embodiments. The aluminum-zirconium alloy can exhibit an electrical conductivity compared to copper of about 56% or more as measured in accordance to the International Annealed Copper Standard (“IACS”). Improved aluminum-zirconium alloys can also exhibit an electrical conductivity of about 55% IACS, or more, in certain embodiments and about 58% IACS, or more, in certain embodiments.

[0018] Additionally, in certain embodiments, improved aluminum-zirconium alloys described herein can exhibit substantially improved creep performance as compared to similar aluminum alloys without the nanoscale precipitates. As can be appreciated, improved creep performance can facilitate the use of such improved aluminum-zirconium alloys in applications that were previously difficult for pure aluminum or known aluminum alloys to be utilized in.

[0019] An improved aluminum-zirconium alloy as described herein can also exhibit improved resistance to stress relaxation resistance. As can be appreciated, stress relaxation is one of the most important concerns in the design of electrical contacts and is defined as the decrease in stress when subject to a constant strain. A conductive element (e.g., wire) formed of improved

aluminum-zirconium alloy, $\text{Al}_{99\%}\text{Fe}_{(0.4-0.5)\%}\text{Zr}_{(0.25-0.3)\%}\text{Sn}_{(0.05-0.1)\%}$, for example, can exhibit a stress relaxation time to reach about 85% of an initial stress that is about 2 times longer in duration than an aluminum-zirconium alloy formed without an inoculant when measured in accordance to ASTM E328 standards. Both conductive elements were initially stressed to 75% of their respective yield strength values. As can be appreciated, improved resistance to stress relaxation can allow for stronger cables that resist deformation or improved electrical connectors.

[0020] In addition to improved stress relaxation resistances, an improved aluminum-zirconium alloy can also exhibit about 40% higher yield stress than a comparative 8000 series aluminum alloy for example, as described by, ASTM Specification B800 and having chemical formula $\text{AlFe}_{0.430\%}\text{Zn}_{0.020\%}\text{Si}_{0.40\%}$. As can be appreciated, such improvements to the yield strength and stress relaxation time can allow for the improved aluminum-zirconium alloy to better withstand higher crimping or terminating forces.

[0021] According to certain embodiments, improved aluminum-zirconium alloys described herein can be formed into a conductive element of an electrical cable through one or more wire processing steps. For example, in certain embodiments, the process of producing a conductive element can include the steps of casting an as-cast shape (*e.g.*, a bar), hot rolling the as-cast shape into a redraw rod, and then drawing the redraw rod into a conductive element, such as a wire. This process can be performed continuously.

[0022] In certain embodiments, an as-cast shape of an improved aluminum-zirconium alloy can be cast using any known casting method. For example, an $\text{Al}_{99\%}\text{Fe}_{(0.4-0.5)\%}\text{Zr}_{(0.25-0.3)\%}\text{Sn}_{(0.05-0.1)\%}$ alloy can be cast by melting the alloy in air at about 800 °C and continuously casting the as-cast shape. As will be appreciated, other casting techniques can be used as known in the art. In certain embodiments, an as-cast shape can subsequently be worked or further formed into a redraw rod using hot rolling techniques prior to wire drawing. As illustration only, a suitable diameter for a redraw rod can be about 9.525 mm (0.375") in diameter.

[0023] The re-draw rod can undergo a wire drawing process to produce a conductive wire or element. Generally, a cold wire drawing process can be utilized to produce wires having excellent electrical and mechanical properties. As can be appreciated, the diameter of the conductive wire can be selected depending upon the electrical and mechanical properties

necessary for any specific cabling application. For example, a conductive wire intended for an overhead conductor cable can be relatively thick in diameter while conductive wires for smaller applications can be thinner. In certain embodiments, more than one wire drawing step can also be used to produce a particularly high gauge (small diameter) wire. As known in the art, it is also possible to produce conductive elements having non-circular cross-sectional shapes through known wire drawing and other forming techniques.

[0024] In certain embodiments, the formation of nanoscale precipitates on an improved aluminum-zirconium alloy can be enhanced through the use of certain additional steps during the wire processing operations. The additional steps can generally include various heat treatment processes such as peak aging and annealing processes. Heat treatment and subsequent cooling can promote precipitation of the nanoscale precipitates. As can be appreciated, the additional steps can also improve the mechanical and electrical properties of the aluminum-zirconium alloy. Advantageously, the heat treatment steps used to promote the precipitation of the present nanoscale precipitates can be shorter in duration and can be performed at lower temperatures than known comparable heat treatment applications for other conventional aluminum alloys.

[0025] A peak aging step (sometimes referred to as precipitation hardening process) can generally refer to the use of elevated heat to produce fine particles of a second phase in an alloy. In the case of the improved aluminum-zirconium alloys described herein, the desired nanoscale precipitates can be formed during peak aging. Peak aging can be performed as a stand-alone heat treatment on a redraw rod, or combined with the annealing step of an intermediate or finished drawn wire. Peak aging can be conducted with any suitable heating system such as resistance furnace, induction furnace, or gas-fired furnace. For an aluminum-zirconium alloy formed of $\text{Al}_{99\%}\text{Fe}_{(0.4-0.5)\%}\text{Zr}_{(0.25-0.3)\%}\text{Sn}_{(0.05-0.1)\%}$, a peak aging process can involve heating the redraw rod after hot rolling to an elevated temperature between about 400 °C to about 450 °C in certain embodiments, and between about 425 °C to about 450 °C in certain embodiments. The duration of a peak aging step can be about 24 hours to about 48 hours in certain embodiments and about 24 hours in certain embodiments. In certain embodiments, peak aging of a redraw rod can slightly increase the tensile strength at lower aging temperatures or slightly decrease the tensile strength at higher aging temperatures and can increase the conductivity from about 52% IACS to

about 58% IACS. After heat aging at 400 °C for 48 hours, the Vickers hardness for an aluminum-zirconium alloy described herein can be about 475 MPa or greater.

[0026] According to certain embodiments, a peak aging step can be combined with an annealing step of an intermediate, or finished, drawn wire. The combination of a peak aging step and an annealing step into a single step can promote the formation of nanoscale precipitates while also acting to improve ductility, lower strength and/or hardness, and recover conductivity lost during work-hardening that can occur during a wire drawing process. The combined annealing and peak aging step can occur in air. In certain embodiments, a combined peak aging and annealing step can occur at a temperature between about 300 °C to about 450 °C for a duration between about 3 hours and about 24 hours. In certain embodiments, an annealing step can be performed following wire drawing after peak aging of a redraw rod. In such embodiments, the annealing step can be used to improve ductility, lower strength and/or hardness, and recover conductivity lost during work-hardening that occurs during the wire drawing process. The optional step of peak aging can influence both the temperature and duration of any annealing step. For example, if a peak aging process is performed on a redraw rod, a later annealing step can occur at a lower temperature and/or for a shorter duration of time than a wire annealed without a peak aging step. For example, an $\text{Al}_{99\%}\text{Fe}_{(0.4-0.5)\%}\text{Zr}_{(0.25-0.3)\%}\text{Sn}_{(0.05-0.1)\%}$ conductive wire undergoing both peak aging and annealing can use a temperature between about 300 °C and about 400 °C for the annealing step instead of a temperature greater than 400 °C used in a comparable cable having a combined annealing and peak aging step. As can be appreciated, if multiple wire drawing steps are performed, an annealing process can be performed after each such step to improve ductility, lower strength and/or hardness, and recover conductivity lost during work-hardening that occurs during such wire drawing processes.

[0027] A non-limiting example of a suitable wire drawing process is disclosed. In the example wire drawing process, a trapezoidal as-cast bar with an about 3,710 mm² (5.75 in²) cross-sectional area can be continuously cast. The trapezoidal as-cast bar can then be hot rolled into a 9.525 mm (0.375") redraw rod. The 9.525 mm redraw rod can be peak-aged for about 48 hours at about 420 °C to form suitable nanoscale precipitates before wire drawing to a 1.6 mm (0.063") intermediate wire. The as-drawn 1.6 mm intermediate wire can then be annealed for about 6 hours at about 400 °C to improve ductility required for further wire drawing. The intermediate

wire can then be wire drawn to an about 0.3 mm (0.0118") diameter wire. The as-drawn 0.3 mm wire can subsequently be annealed to further improve ductility, lower strength and/or hardness, and recover conductivity lost during work-hardening associated with the final wire drawing step.

[0028] Additional details about suitable aluminum-zirconium alloys and heat treatment steps are disclosed in U.S. Patent App. Publication No. 2015/0259773 A1 which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

[0029] Cables including conductive elements formed from the improved aluminum-zirconium alloys described herein can be used in a variety of applications including, for example, automotive applications, aerospace applications, power transmission applications, household cabling applications, and any other application requiring a lightweight cable. For example, improved aluminum-zirconium alloys described herein can be particularly useful as a power cable in automotive and aerospace power systems including for example, as a battery wire in an electrically powered vehicle. Conductive elements formed from an improved aluminum-zirconium alloy as disclosed herein can be used in wires as small as about 1 μm in diameter in certain embodiments or as large as about 25.4 mm (1") inch diameter in certain embodiments. For example, aluminum bond wires as small as about 18 μm (0.7 mils) in diameter can be formed in certain embodiments and wire as large as about 4/0 (11.68 mm or 0.46") inch diameter can be formed in certain embodiments.

[0030] Generally, the present aluminum-zirconium alloy conductive wires or elements can be utilized similarly to conductive wires or elements produced from known aluminum alloys such as heat resistant aluminum-zirconium alloys and 8000 series aluminum alloys. Certain conventional examples of heat resistant aluminum-zirconium alloys are described in the specification for the ASTM B941 testing protocol and can have, for example, the chemical formula $\text{AlZr}_{0.287\%}\text{Fe}_{0.206\%}\text{Si}_{0.045\%}$. As will be appreciated however, the improved creep resistance and stress relaxation resistance of the improved aluminum-zirconium alloys described herein can allow for improved performance of the cables as well as new uses.

[0031] Cables including conductive elements formed of the improved aluminum-zirconium alloys described herein can generally be constructed using known techniques and cable geometries by replacing the existing conductive elements with the conductive element formed

from the improved aluminum-zirconium alloy. For example, simple power cables can be formed by stranding aluminum-zirconium alloy conductive elements and then coating the conductive elements with an insulation layer and/or jacket layer. Any known insulation layer or jacket layer can be utilized as known in the art.

[0032] In certain embodiments, conductive elements formed of an improved aluminum-zirconium alloy described herein can be included in overhead conductor cables. As can be appreciated, overhead conductors can be formed in a variety of configurations including aluminum conductor steel reinforced (“ACSR”) cables, aluminum conductor steel supported (“ACSS”) cables, aluminum conductor composite core (“ACCC”) cables and all aluminum alloy conductor (“AAAC”) cables. ACSR cables are high-strength stranded conductors and include outer conductive strands, and supportive center strands. The outer conductive strands can be formed from the improved aluminum-zirconium alloys described herein. The center supportive strands can be steel and can have the strength required to support the more ductile outer conductive strands. ACSR cables can have an overall high tensile strength. ACSS cables are concentric-lay-stranded cables and include a central core of steel around which is stranded one, or more, layers of the improved aluminum-zirconium alloy wires. ACCC cables, in contrast, are reinforced by a central core formed from one, or more, of carbon, glass fiber, or polymer materials. A composite core can offer a variety of advantages over an all-aluminum or steel-reinforced conventional cable as the composite core’s combination of high tensile strength and low thermal sag enables longer spans. ACCC cables can enable new lines to be built with fewer supporting structures. AAAC cables can be made with the improved aluminum-zirconium alloy wires. ACSR, ACSS, ACCC, and AAAC cables can be used as overhead cables for overhead distribution and transmission lines.

[0033] Composite core conductors are useful due to having lower sag at higher operating temperatures and their higher strength to weight ratio. Non-limiting examples of composite cores can be found in U.S. Pat. No. 7,015,395, U.S. Pat. No. 7,438,971, U.S. Pat. No. 7,752,754, U.S. Patent App. No. 2012/0186851, U.S. Pat. No. 8,371,028, U.S. Pat. No. 7,683,262, and U.S. Patent App. No. 2012/0261158, each of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0034] Beneficial properties of the improved aluminum-zirconium alloys described herein can also facilitate the formation of bonding wires from the described alloys. As can be appreciated, bonding wires are used to facilitate the electrical interconnection of one or more components across relatively short distances. For example, bonding wires can be used for the interconnection of a microprocessor (microelectronic device) to a microprocessor package or printed circuit board, a battery cell to another battery cell, or can be used in down-hole drilling electronics. Examples of wire bonding are disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 7,671,565 and U.S. Patent No. 4,580,713 each of which is incorporated herein by reference. Suitable bonding wires are formed of metals and metal alloys which exhibit a variety of useful properties such as good bonding strength to substrates, and resistance to heat, fatigue, and creep. The improved aluminum-zirconium alloys described herein can exhibit a good balance of these properties and wires formed of the improved alloys can exhibit better endurance performance than wires formed of pure aluminum.

[0035] For example, bonding wires formed of the aluminum-zirconium alloys described herein can demonstrate good results when tested according to the heat aging processes described in ASTM B941, can resist fatigue failure for at least about 10^6 cycles at 85 MPa of applied stress when tested in accordance to ASTM E466, and can exhibit a creep rate of about 50% an hour or less when subjected to 50 MPa of applied stress at a temperature of 185 °C when tested in accordance to ASTM E139. In certain embodiments, the described bonding wires can resist fatigue failure for at least about 10^7 cycles at 85 MPa of applied stress when tested in accordance to ASTM E466. In certain embodiments, the described bonding wires can exhibit a creep rate of about 25% an hour or less when subjected to 50 MPa of applied stress at a temperature of 185 °C when tested in accordance to ASTM E139 and, in certain embodiments, can exhibit a creep rate of about 15% an hour or less.

[0036] The ASTM B941 standard provides guidance on sample preparation and heat aging testing protocol for heat resistant aluminum-zirconium round wires. Aluminum-zirconium cables described herein demonstrated an ultimate tensile strength value after heat aging for 1 hour at 280 °C of about 90% or more of the unaged ultimate tensile strength value when tested in accordance to ASTM B941. In certain embodiments, about 95% or more of the unaged ultimate

tensile strength was retained. In certain embodiments, about 99% or more of the ultimate tensile strength was retained.

[0037] In addition, bonding wires 387 μm in diameter and formed of the described aluminum-zirconium alloys required about 1000 cN of pull force to break the wire when tested in accordance to ASTM F459 and more than 2,500 gram-force to break the wire when tested in accordance to the JESD22-B116 shear force test with 20 mil (0.508 mm) wire. These results demonstrate the bonding strength of the wires. As can be appreciated, such properties can allow bonding wires formed of the described aluminum-zirconium alloys to be used in a variety of conditions which subject the bonding wire to elevated temperatures and mechanical stress such as for the interconnection of battery cells in an electric car.

[0038] Bonding wires formed of 99.99% pure aluminum, in contrast, exhibit unfavorable properties such as poor results on the ASTM B941 test by exhibiting an ultimate tensile strength of less than about 75% of the pre-aged ultimate tensile strength. Pure aluminum wires also fail a fatigue test applying 85 MPa of applied stress after less than 10^5 cycles when tested in accordance to ASTM E466.

[0039] Suitable bonding wires can have a diameter of about 1 μm to about 1,000 μm depending on the specific interconnection being made by the bonding wire. Bonding wires formed of the aluminum-zirconium alloys described herein can have diameters of about 1 μm to about 1,000 μm in certain embodiments, about 100 μm to about 700 μm in certain embodiments, and about 300 μm to about 500 μm in certain embodiments. The bonding wires described herein can have a length of about 1 mm to about 50 mm in certain embodiments. As can be appreciated, the dimensions of bonding wires can also be described in terms of the ratio between the wire's length and diameter. Suitable ratios between the length and the diameter of the bonding wires described herein can include ratios of about 100:1 in certain embodiments; about 50:1 in certain embodiments; about 20:1 in certain embodiments; about 12:1 in certain embodiments; about 10:1 in certain embodiments; about 5:1 in certain embodiments; about 3:1 in certain embodiments; and about 1:1 in certain embodiments.

[0040] Suitable metal substrates which the described bonding wires can be bonded to can include nickel substrates, palladium substrates, gold substrates, silver substrates, and substrates formed of any alloys of such metals.

[0041] As can be appreciated, bonding wires can generally be bonded to metal substrates using techniques known in the art. Techniques used to bond a bonding wire to a substrate can include, for example, thermocompression bonding, thermosonic ball-wedge bonding, and ultrasonic wedge-wedge bonding. Thermosonic bonding is particularly useful when utilizing bonding wires formed of the described aluminum-zirconium alloys.

Examples

[0042] Table 1 depicts the compositions of several Example aluminum alloys. Comparative Examples 1 and 2 are 8000 series aluminum alloy and heat resistant aluminum-zirconium alloy respectively. Inventive Examples 3 and 4 depict aluminum-zirconium alloys including a tin inoculant. The Example aluminum alloys depicted in Table 1 were processed into wires to evaluate various physical and electrical properties exhibited by the alloys.

TABLE 1

Alloy	Fe	Zr	Sn	Other Elements					Al and Unavoidable Impurities
				Si	Zn	Ti	Ga	V	
Comparative Example 1 (8000 series aluminum alloy)	0.430%	--	--	0.040%	0.020%	0.01%	0.01%	--	Remainder
Comparative Example 2 (Heat resistant aluminum-zirconium alloy)	0.206%	0.287%	--	0.045%	0.010%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	Remainder
Inventive Example 3	0.430%	0.300%	0.100%	0.040%	0.020%	--	--	--	Remainder
Inventive Example 4	0.431%	0.266%	0.072%	0.043%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%	Remainder

[0043] Table 2 depicts the results of testing 3.175 mm wires formed of the aluminum alloys of Comparative Example 1 and Inventive Example 3. The wires of each Example aluminum alloy were evaluated for elongation at break, ultimate tensile strength (“UTS”), conductivity, and stress relaxation at room temperature. Stress relaxation time was measured in accordance with ASTM E328. UTS and elongation at break was measured in accordance with ASTM E8.

TABLE 2

ID	Elongation (%)	UTS (MPa)	Conductivity at 20 °C (% IACS)	Stress Relaxation Time* (hours))
Comparative Example 1	12 - 16	94-117	62.0-62.6	2.7 (85% of initial stress) 15.1 (80% of initial stress)
Inventive Example 3	14.9-15.7	140-142	58.2-60.4	5.5 (85% of initial stress) 59.7 (80% of initial stress)

[0044] As depicted in Table 2 and FIG. 1, the wires formed of the alloy of Inventive Example 3 exhibits superior ultimate tensile strength and stress relaxation compared to the wires formed of the aluminum alloy of Comparative Example 1.

[0045] FIG. 1 further depicts the room temperature stress relaxation results of the wires formed of Comparative Examples 1 and Inventive Example 3 evaluated in Table 2. As illustrated by FIG. 1, the wires formed of Inventive Example 3 take about twice as long as the wires formed of Comparative Example 1 to relax to 85% of the initial stress (5.5 hours compared to 2.7 hours). The initial stress was set at 75% of the yield stress in each case. This difference in stress relaxation time increases with increasing time. For example, the wires formed of Inventive Example 3 take about 4 times as long as the wires formed of Comparative Example 1 to relax to 80% of the initial stress (extrapolated to 59.7 hours compared to 15.1 hours).

[0046] Table 3 depicts the heat aging performance of 9.525 mm redraw rods formed from the aluminum alloys of Comparative Example 2 and Inventive Example 4. The heat aging performance details the UTS and IACS conductivity of the redraw rods after heat aging at

temperatures of about 400 °C for 8 hours, 24 hours, and 48 hours. Ultimate tensile strength was determined by measuring the Vickers hardness in accordance to ASTM E92 and then correlating the ultimate tensile strength from the Vickers hardness value by multiplying by about one-third (1/3).

TABLE 3

Aging Time (hours)	UTS (MPa)			Conductivity at 20 °C (% IACS)		
	Comparative Example 2	Inventive Example 4	% Different	Comparative Example 2	Inventive Example 4	% Different
0	137	155	12.6	52.4	50.4	-3.8
8	124	145	16.7	55.3	53.3	-3.6
24	136	164	20.6	56.2	55.6	-1.1
48	125	163	29.8	57.7	57.2	0.0
% Improvement/ drop after 48 hours	-8.7	5.2		10.1	13.5	

[0047] As depicted in Table 3, redraw rods formed of the aluminum alloys of Inventive Example 4 exhibit improved properties after heat aging and the redraw rods match or exceed the properties of the redraw rods formed from the aluminum alloys of Comparative Example 2. For example, the redraw rods formed of the aluminum alloy of Inventive Example 4 exhibit a superior UTS both in absolute values as well as improvement after heat aging. The redraw rods formed of Inventive Example 4 also match the IACS conductivity of the redraw rods formed from the aluminum alloy of Comparative Example 2 after heat aging for 48 hours.

Isochronal Aging Performance

[0048] Table 4 depicts the shift in peak aging properties for 38.1 mm (1.5”) as-cast rods formed from the aluminum alloys of Comparative Example 5 and Inventive Example 6 after heat aging for a constant time. The as-cast rods formed from Comparative Example 5 and Inventive Example 6 differ in their inclusion of a tin inoculant. The aluminum alloy of Comparative Example 5 is $\text{AlFe}_{0.55}\text{Zr}_{0.34}$ while the aluminum alloy of Inventive Example 6 is $\text{AlFe}_{0.55}\text{Zr}_{0.34}\text{Sn}_{0.1}$. Ultimate tensile strength was determined by measuring the Vickers hardness

in accordance to ASTM E92 and then correlating the ultimate tensile strength from the Vickers hardness value by multiplying by about one-third (1/3).

TABLE 4

	Comparative Example 5	Inventive Example 6
Peak Aging Temperature (°C)	475	430
UTS (MPa)		
Initial	92	110
At peak aging temperature	153	165
Conductivity (%) IACS)		
Initial	50	51.5
At peak aging temperature	57	57.5

[0049] As depicted by Table 4, the as-cast rods formed of Inventive Example 6 exhibit a higher initial UTS before heat aging (110 MPa vs 92 MPa), a higher peak UTS after heat aging (165 MPa vs 153 MPa), and achieve the peak UTS at a lower heat aging temperature than the as-cast rods formed of Comparative Example 5 (430 °C vs. 475 °C). The as-cast rods formed of Inventive Example 6 exhibit a 50.0% increase in UTS after heat aging. Similar trends are also seen for the conductivity of as-cast rods formed of Inventive Example 6.

Constant Temperature Aging Performance

[0050] Table 5 depicts the UTS and conductivity of an as-cast 38.1 mm (1.5”) rod formed of the alloys of Comparative Example 5 and Inventive Example 6 after undergoing heat aging at a constant temperature of 450 °C. As illustrated by Table 5, the as-cast rods formed of Inventive Example 6 exhibit a higher initial UTS and conductivity than the as-cast rods formed of Comparative Example 5 and achieves these benefits with a shorter heat aging duration. After heat aging, the as-cast rods formed of Inventive Example 6 exhibit a 30.4% increase in UTS. Ultimate tensile strength was determined by measuring the Vickers hardness in accordance to

ASTM E92 and then correlating the ultimate tensile strength from the Vickers hardness value by multiplying by about one-third (1/3).

TABLE 5

	Comparative Example 5	Inventive Example 6
Peak Aging Time	80 hours	30 hours
UTS (MPa)		
Initial	87	115
At Peak Aging Time	127	150
Conductivity (% IACS)		
Initial	49	51.5
At Peak Aging Temperature	59	59.5

[0051] Table 6 depicts the effect of tin on UTS & conductivity of 9.5 mm redraw rods after heat aging at 400 °C for several periods of time. Table 6 includes redraw rods formed of Comparative Example 7 and Inventive Example 8. The aluminum alloy of Comparative Example 7 is $\text{AlFe}_{0.43}\text{Zr}_{0.3}$ and the aluminum alloy of Inventive Example 8 is $\text{AlFe}_{0.43}\text{Zr}_{0.3}\text{Sn}_{0.072}$. Ultimate tensile strength was determined by measuring the Vickers hardness in accordance to ASTM E92 and then correlating the ultimate tensile strength from the Vickers hardness value by multiplying by about one-third (1/3).

TABLE 6

Aging Time (hours)	UTS (MPa)			Conductivity at 20 °C (% IACS)		
	Comparative Example 7	Inventive Example 8	% Difference	Comparative Example 7	Inventive Example 8	% Difference
0	156	169	8.3	53.7	50.6	-5.8
8	136	158	16.1	55.6	53.4	-3.9
24	135	179	17.0	56.7	55.6	-1.9
48	138	178	29.0	57.2	57.3	+0.2
% Improvement/ drop after 48 hours	-11.6	5.3		6.5	13.2	

[0052] As depicted by Table 6, the redraw rods of Inventive Example 8, including 0.072% tin, enabled a UTS peak to occur after about 24 hours of heat aging. The redraw rods of Comparative Example 7, formed without tin, had a UTS peak occur only after 48 hours of heat aging. Furthermore, the addition of 0.072% tin increased the UTS by about 29% after 48 hours of aging, with only minor changes in the electrical conductivity.

[0053] Table 7 depicts the elongation at break, ultimate tensile strength, conductivity, and creep of 0.3 mm diameter bonding wires formed of pure aluminum (99.99% Al minimum and labeled as Comparative Example 9), and from the aluminum alloy of Inventive Example 4. As illustrated by Table 7, the wires formed of Inventive Example 4 exhibit improved UTS, elongation at break, and a creep rate at 185 °C that is about 21 times or more slower than the creep rate of wires formed of 99.99% pure aluminum at an applied stress of 30 to 70 MPa when measured in accordance to ASTM E139.

TABLE 7

Example	Elongation (%)	UTS (MPa)	Conductivity at 20 °C (% IACS)	Creep Rate at 185 °C (%/hr)
Comparative Example 9 (Pure Aluminum)	11.4	103.8	63.5	7 (30 MPa Applied Stress) 210 (50 MPa Applied Stress) 2500 (70 MPa Applied Stress)
Inventive Example 4	12.4	110	59.9	0 (30 MPa Applied Stress) 10 (50 MPa Applied Stress) 110 (70 MPa Applied Stress)

[0054] As depicted in Table 8, additional bonding wire performance was evaluated using wires formed of 99.99% pure aluminum (Comparative Example 9) and the aluminum alloy of Inventive Example 4. The wires formed of Comparative Example 9 were 380 μm in diameter while the wires formed of Inventive Example 4 were 392 μm in diameter.

TABLE 8

Example	UTS (MPa)	Conductivity at 20 °C (% IACS)
Comparative Example 9 (Pure Aluminum) - 380 μm wire	60.5	63.8
Inventive Example 4 - 392 μm wire	88.9	59.0

Heat Aging Performance

[0055] Table 9 depicts the UTS of 300 μm diameter wires formed from the aluminum alloy of Inventive Example 4 and 99.99% pure aluminum (Comparative Example 9) after heat aging at 300 °C. As illustrated by Table 9, the wires formed of Inventive Example 4 exhibit a UTS drop of about 4% after heat aging for 24 hours while the wires formed of pure aluminum exhibit a UTS drop of about 25%.

TABLE 9

Ultimate Tensile Strength (MPa) after Heat Aging for:	Inventive Example 4	Comparative Example 9 (Pure Aluminum)
Initial	111.0	95.1
2 hours	106.2	73.1
5 hours	106.9	71.0
24 hours	106.2	71.7

[0056] The 300 μm diameter wires formed of Inventive Example 4 also demonstrated excellent results when tested in accordance to ASTM B941 heat resistance standards. The ASTM B941 standard describes heat aging of a sample at 280 °C for 1 hour and then cooling the sample to room temperature. The 300 μm wires formed of Inventive Example 4 retained greater than 99% of the room temperature UTS when tested in accordance to ASTM B941.

Fatigue Performance

[0057] FIG. 2 depicts the room temperature fatigue properties of 1.6 mm wire formed from the aluminum alloys of Comparative Example 1 and Inventive Example 4. As depicted by FIG. 2, the wires formed from the aluminum alloy of Inventive Example 4 exhibited superior fatigue performance compared to the wires formed from the aluminum alloy of Comparative Example 1 when tested in accordance to ASTM E466.

Bond Performance for Bonding Wire Applications

[0058] An industrial heavy-aluminum wire wedge bonding machine (Hesse Mechatronics BJ939) was used to assess the bonding performance of bonding wires formed of the Example aluminum alloys. The performance was evaluated assessing about 1000 bonds made with a 2-step ultrasonic voltage application. Bonding performance of wires formed of the aluminum alloy

of Inventive Example 4 were found to match or exceed the performance of identical wires formed of pure aluminum and other typical aluminum bonding wire alloys (such as Al-1%Si & Al-Mg). The wires formed of Inventive Example 4 did not exhibit any bond failures (including any heel cracks, abnormal tail lengths, bond ears, or deformed areas) with proper setting of relevant bond parameters (ultrasonic power, bonding force, ultrasonic duration, and loop height). Furthermore, the bonds performed very well in standard pull tests and shear tests. For example, bonds made with 387 μm wire formed of Inventive Example 4 survived a 1000 cN pull test conducted in accordance to ASTM F459 and greater than a 2500 gram-force in a 20 mil (0.508 mm) shear test conducted in accordance JESD22-B116A. The results of the shear test are depicted in FIG. 3.

[0059] It should be understood that every maximum numerical limitation given throughout this specification includes every lower numerical limitation, as if such lower numerical limitations were expressly written herein. Every minimum numerical limitation given throughout this specification will include every higher numerical limitation, as if such higher numerical limitations were expressly written herein. Every numerical range given throughout this specification will include every narrower numerical range that falls within such broader numerical range, as if such narrower numerical ranges were all expressly written herein.

[0060] Every document cited herein, including any cross-referenced or related patent or application, is hereby incorporated herein by reference in its entirety unless expressly excluded or otherwise limited. The citation of any document is not an admission that it is prior art with respect to any invention disclosed or claimed herein or that it alone, or in any combination with any other reference or references, teaches, suggests, or discloses any such invention. Further, to the extent that any meaning or definition of a term in this document conflicts with any meaning or definition of the same term in a document incorporated by reference, the meaning or definition assigned to that term in the document shall govern.

[0061] The foregoing description of embodiments and examples has been presented for purposes of description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or limiting to the forms described. Numerous modifications are possible in light of the above teachings. Some of those modifications have been discussed and others will be understood by those skilled in the art. The embodiments were

chosen and described for illustration of ordinary skill in the art. Rather it is hereby intended the scope be defined by the claims appended various embodiments. The scope is, of course, not limited to the examples or embodiments set forth herein, but can be employed in any number of applications and equivalent articles by those of hereto.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A bonding wire formed from an aluminum-zirconium alloy, the aluminum-zirconium alloy comprising an inoculant, wherein the bonding wire exhibits at least two of the following:

an ultimate tensile strength value after heat aging for 1 hour at 280 °C of about 90% or more of the unaged ultimate tensile strength value when tested in accordance to ASTM B941;

resistance to fatigue failure for at least about 10^6 cycles at 85 MPa of applied stress when tested in accordance with ASTM E466; and

a creep rate of about 50% an hour or less at 50 MPa of applied stress and a temperature of about 185 °C when tested in accordance to ASTM E139.

2. The bonding wire of claim 1, wherein the inoculant comprises one or more of tin, indium, antimony, and magnesium.

3. The bonding wire of claim 1, wherein the aluminum-zirconium alloy comprises:

about 99% by weight aluminum;

about 0.2% to about 0.4% by weight zirconium;

about 0.3% to about 0.5% by weight iron; and

about 0.01% to about 0.2% by weight tin.

4. The bonding wire of claim 1 has a diameter of about 300 μm to about 500 μm .

5. The bonding wire of claim 4, wherein the pull force required to break the bonding wire in accordance to ASTM F459 is about 1,000 cN or more; and the shear force required to break the bonding wire in accordance to JESD22-B116A is about 2,500 gram-force or more when the bonding wire has a diameter of about 387 μm .

6. The bonding wire of claim 1 has a length to diameter ratio of about 100:1 to about 1:1.

7. A battery system for a vehicle, the battery system comprising at least two battery cells and a bonding wire of claim 1, wherein the at least two battery cells are connected by the bonding wire.
8. A microelectronics device comprising the bonding wire of claim 1.
9. A cable comprising:

at least one conductive element formed from an aluminum-zirconium alloy, the aluminum-zirconium alloy comprising an inoculant; and

wherein the at least one conductive element has an ultimate tensile strength of about 120 MPa or more after heat aging for 48 hours at 400 °C; and exhibits a stress relaxation time to reach about 85% of an initial stress that is about 2 times longer in duration than a similar aluminum-zirconium alloy formed without an inoculant when measured in accordance to ASTM E328.
10. The cable of claim 9, wherein the aluminum-zirconium alloy comprises about 0.01% to about 0.2% of the inoculant and wherein the inoculant comprises one or more of tin, indium, antimony, and magnesium.
11. The cable of claim 9, wherein the aluminum-zirconium alloy further comprises one or more of iron and silicon.
12. The cable of claim 9, wherein the aluminum-zirconium alloy comprises about 0.1% to about 0.5% zirconium.
13. The cable of claim 9, wherein the at least one conductive element has an electrical conductivity of about 55% or more in accordance to International Annealed Copper Standard (“IACS”).
14. The cable of claim 9, wherein the at least one conductive element has an elongation at break of about 7% or greater.
15. The cable of claim 9 is a bonding wire.

16. A method of making a cable, the method comprising:

continuously casting an as-cast shape formed of an aluminum-zirconium alloy, the aluminum-zirconium alloy comprising an inoculant,

hot rolling the as-cast shape to form a redraw rod;

drawing the redraw rod into a wire; and

annealing the wire to form a cable; and

wherein the conductive element exhibits at least two of the following:

an ultimate tensile strength value after heat aging for 1 hour at 280 °C of about 90% or more of the unaged ultimate tensile strength value when tested in accordance to ASTM B941;

resistance to fatigue failure for at least about 10^6 cycles at 85 MPa of applied stress when tested in accordance with ASTM E466; and

a creep rate of about 50% an hour or less at 50 MPa of applied stress and a temperature of about 185 °C when tested in accordance to ASTM E139.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising the step of cutting the cable to form a bonding wire having a length to diameter ratio of about 100:1 to about 1:1.

18. The method of claim 16, further comprising the step of peak aging the redraw rod prior to drawing, the peak aging step comprising heating the redraw rod to a temperature between about 400 °C and about 450 °C for a period of time ranging from about 6 hours to about 12 hours.

19. The method of claim 18, where the period of time of the peak aging step is about 10 hours or more shorter in duration than a period of time for a peak aging step of a similar aluminum-zirconium alloy formed without an inoculant.

20. The method of claim 16, wherein the step of annealing the pre-wire product comprises heating the wire to a temperature between about 300 °C and about 450 °C for a period of time ranging from about 6 hours to about 24 hours.

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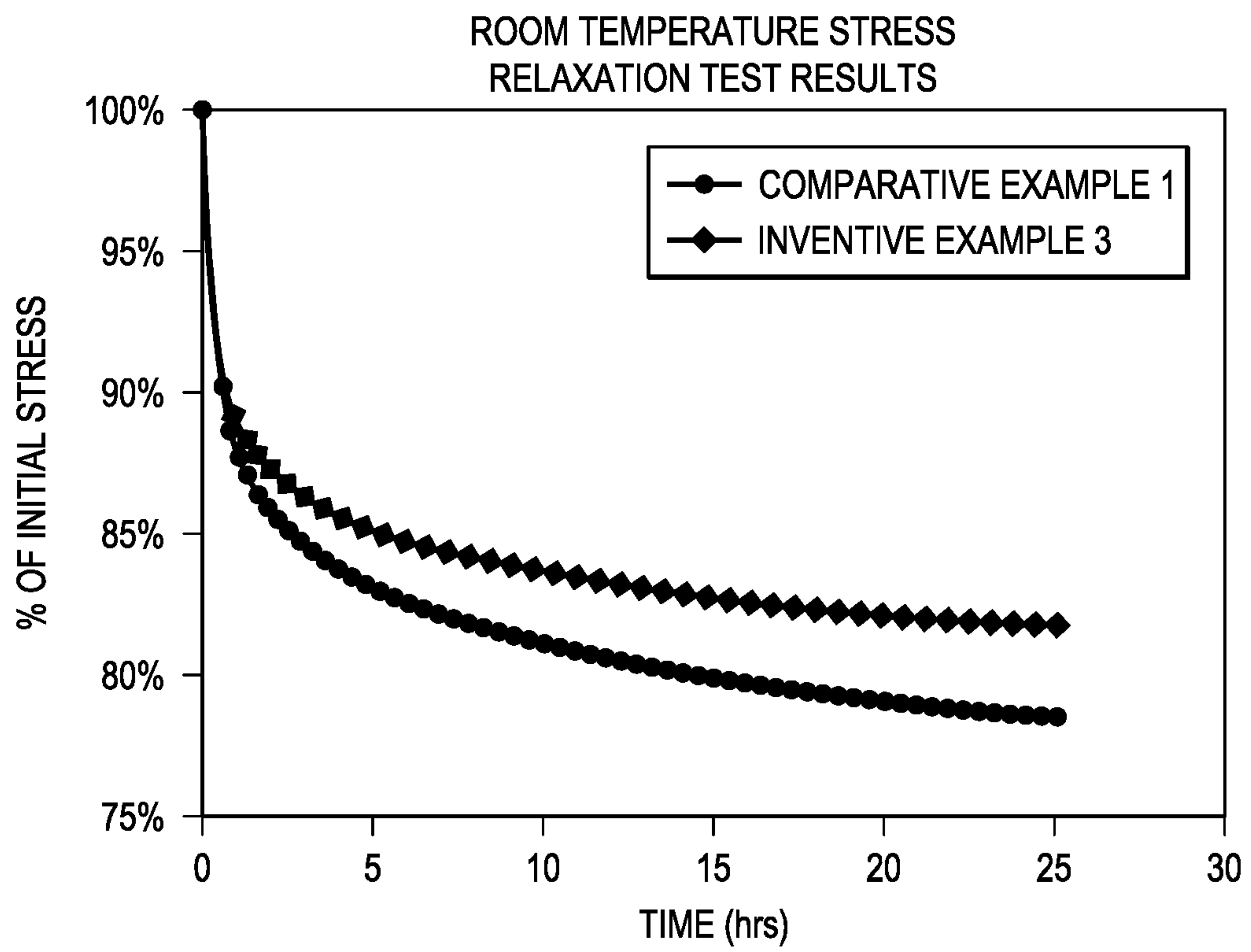


FIG. 1

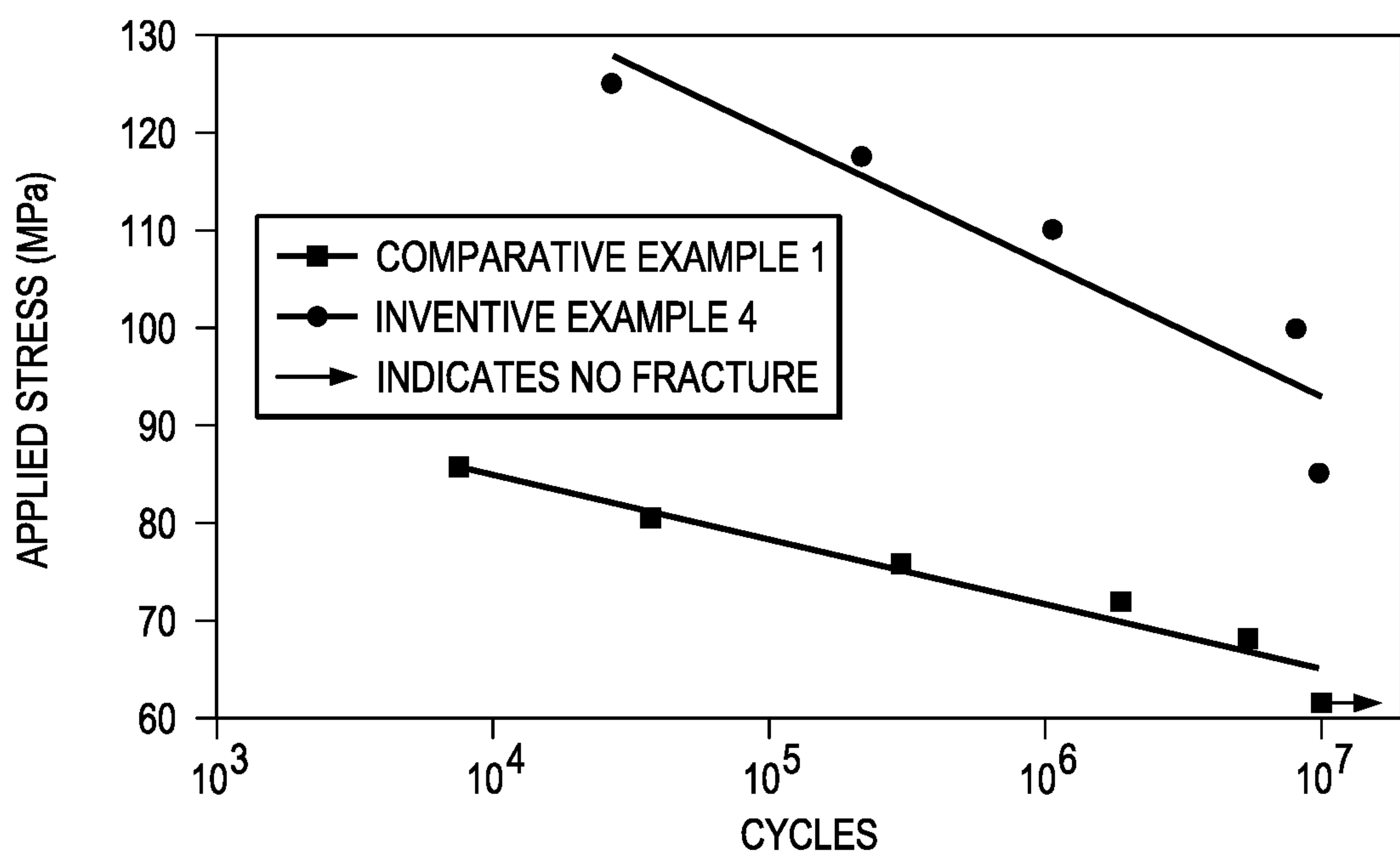


FIG. 2

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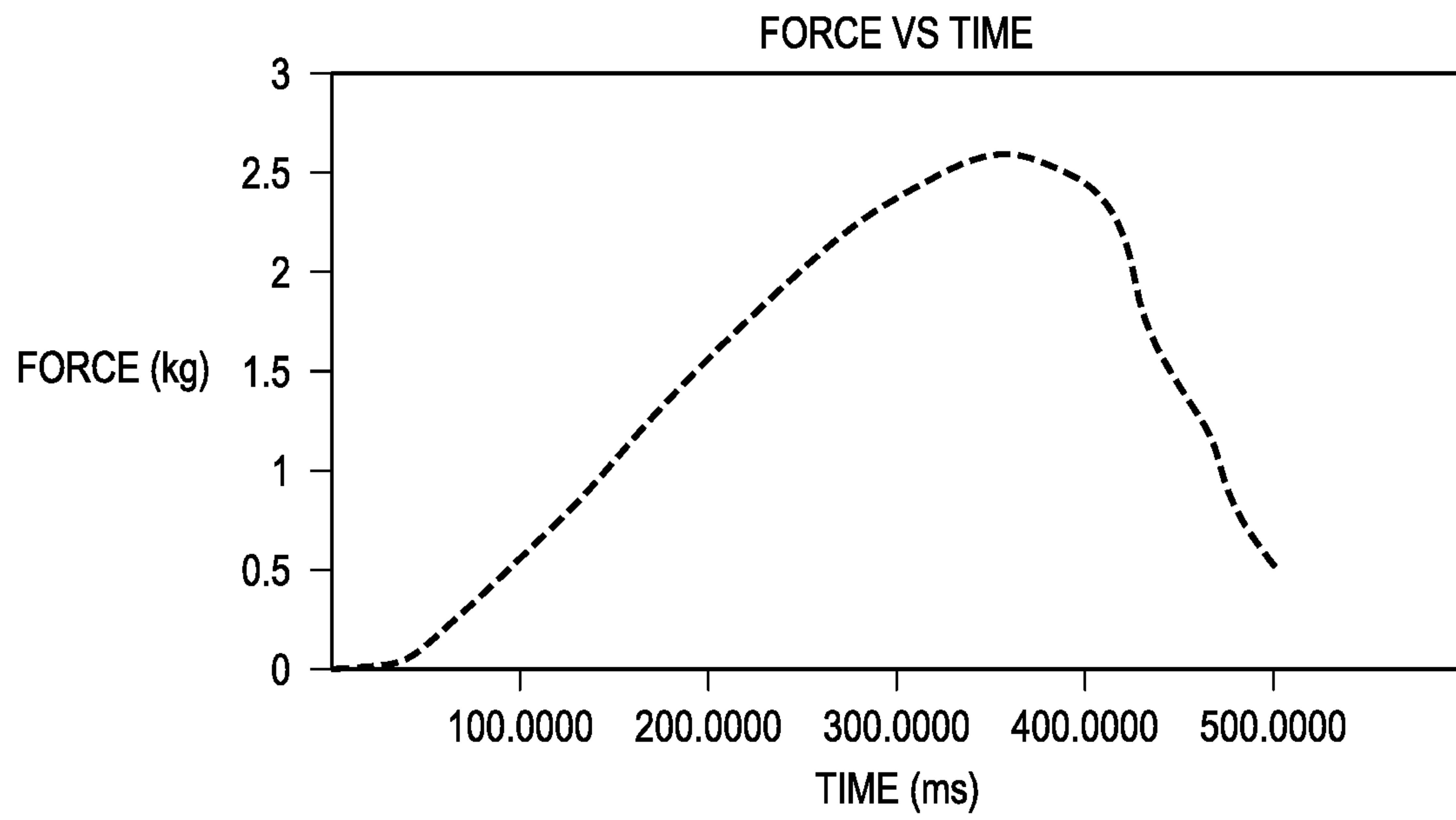


FIG. 3

ROOM TEMPERATURE STRESS RELAXATION TEST RESULTS

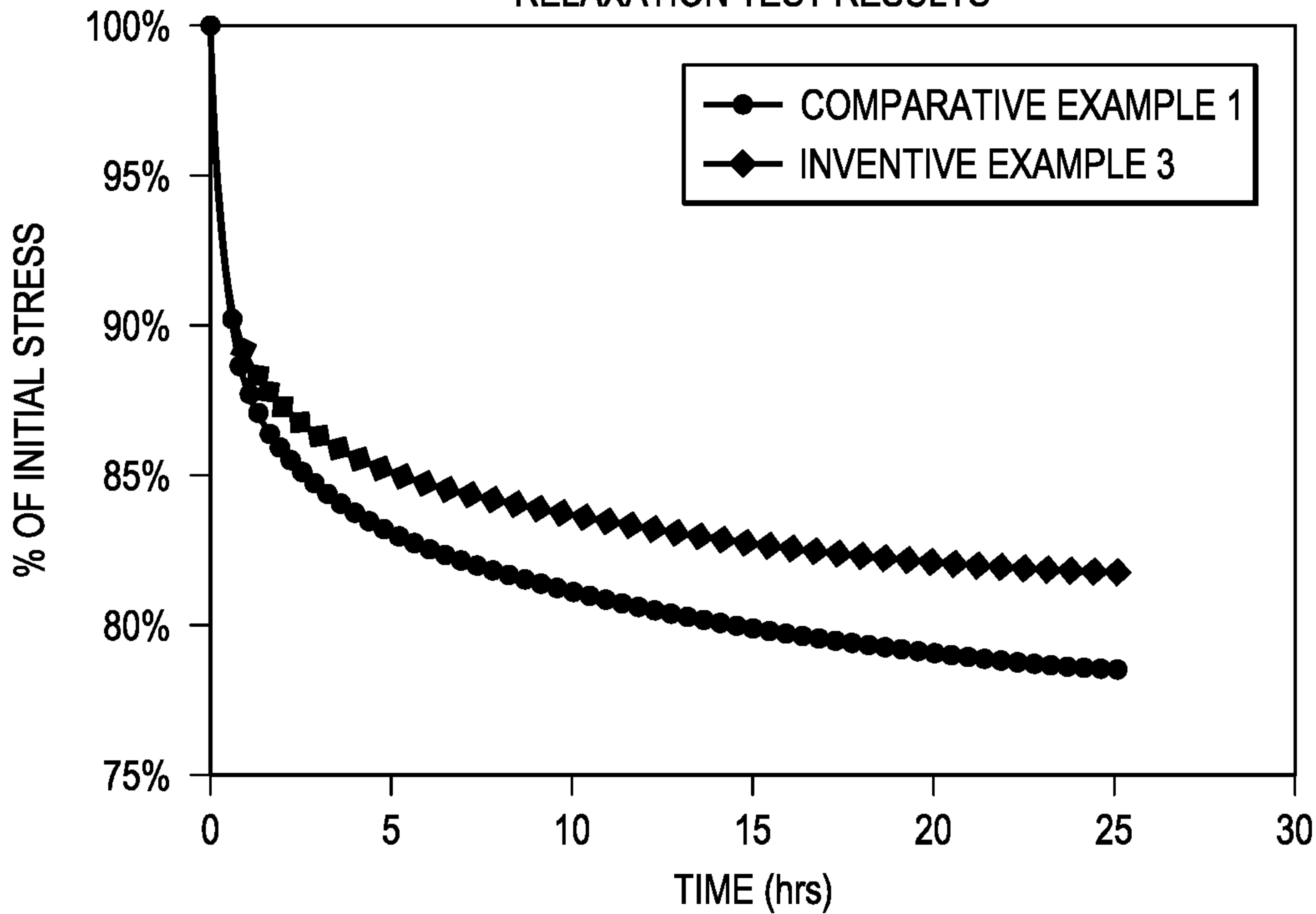


FIG. 1