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(54) **PRODUCTION DE MATERIAUX COMPOSITES A BASE DE
CARBONE SERVANT A LA REALISATION DE CELLULES DE
PRODUCTION D'ALUMINIUM**

(54) **PRODUCTION OF CARBON-BASED COMPOSITE MATERIALS
AS COMPONENTS OF ALUMINIUM PRODUCTION CELLS**

(57) Procédé de production d'un élément destiné à une cellule de production d'aluminium et constitué d'une matière composite à base de carbone renfermant un borure, carbure, oxyde ou nitrure métallique réfractaire, ou des combinaisons ou mélanges de celui-ci et d'aluminium, de titane, de silicium et de zirconium, ainsi que leurs alliages et précurseurs. Le procédé consiste, dans un premier temps, à former un mélange réactionnel d'aluminium, de titane, de silicium ou de zirconium et de précurseurs aptes à réagir de manière à former le composé métallique réfractaire, et éventuellement de matières de charge et d'additifs. On mélange le mélange réactionnel avec 1 à 20 parties en poids de carbone particulaire pour 1 partie en poids du mélange réactionnel; ainsi qu'avec un liant colloïdal renfermant au moins une substance choisie parmi la silice, l'alumine, l'yttria, l'oxyde cérique, la thoria, la zircone, la magnésie et l'oxyde de lithium colloïdaux, en une quantité suffisante pour mouiller la totalité des particules de carbone. On soumet le mélange ainsi obtenu au compactage et au séchage puis on le chauffe afin de déclencher une réaction micropyrétique auto-propagée du mélange réactionnel.

(57) A method of producing a component of an aluminium production cell made of a carbon-based composite material containing a refractory hard metal boride, carbide, oxide, nitride or combinations or mixtures thereof and aluminium, titanium, silicon and zirconium, and alloys and compounds thereof, comprises firstly providing a reaction mixture of aluminium, titanium, silicon or zirconium and precursors which react to form the refractory hard metal compound, and optional fillers and additives. The reaction mixture is mixed with particulate carbon in an amount of from 1 to 20 parts by weight of carbon for 1 part by weight of the reaction mixture; and with a colloidal binder containing at least one of colloidal silica, alumina, yttria, ceria, thoria, zirconia, magnesia, lithia, in an amount to fully wet the carbon particles. The resulting mixture is compacted and dried and heated to initiate reaction of the reaction mixture by self-propagating micropyrétique reaction.





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(21) International Application Number: PCT/IB94/00044 (22) International Filing Date: 21 March 1994 (21.03.94) (30) Priority Data: 08/034,276 22 March 1993 (22.03.93) US (71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): MOLTECH INVENT S.A. [LU/LU]; 68-70, boulevard de la Pétrusse, L-2320 Luxembourg (LU). (72) Inventors; and (75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): SEKHAR, Jainagesh, A. [IN/US]; University of Cincinnati, Mail Location 0012, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0012 (US). DE NORA, Vittorio [IT/BS]; Sandrigham House, Naussau Bahamas (BS). (74) Agent: CRONIN, Brian; Moltech S.A., 9, route de Troinex, CH-1227 Carouge (CH).	<div style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">2154887</div> (81) Designated States: AU, BR, CA, CN, CZ, HU, JP, KP, KR, NO, NZ, PL, RO, RU, SK, UA, US, European patent (AT, BE, CH, DE, DK, ES, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE). Published <i>With international search report.</i>	
(54) Title: PRODUCTION OF CARBON-BASED COMPOSITE MATERIALS AS COMPONENTS OF ALUMINIUM PRODUCTION CELLS		
(57) Abstract <p>A method of producing a component of an aluminium production cell made of a carbon-based composite material containing a refractory hard metal boride, carbide, oxide, nitride or combinations or mixtures thereof and aluminium, titanium, silicon and zirconium, and alloys and compounds thereof, comprises firstly providing a reaction mixture of aluminium, titanium, silicon or zirconium and precursors which react to form the refractory hard metal compound, and optional fillers and additives. The reaction mixture is mixed with particulate carbon in an amount of from 1 to 20 parts by weight of carbon for 1 part by weight of the reaction mixture; and with a colloidal binder containing at least one of colloidal silica, alumina, yttria, ceria, thoria, zirconia, magnesia, lithia, in an amount to fully wet the carbon particles. The resulting mixture is compacted and dried and heated to initiate reaction of the reaction mixture by self-propagating micropyretic reaction.</p>		

PRODUCTION OF CARBON-BASED COMPOSITE MATERIALS AS
COMPONENTS OF ALUMINIUM PRODUCTION CELLS

Field of the Invention

The invention relates to components of aluminium production cells made of carbon-based composite materials containing refractory hard metal borides, carbides, oxides, nitrides, or combinations or mixtures thereof, and at least one of aluminium, titanium, silicon and zirconium and alloys and compounds thereof, and is particularly concerned with improved methods of producing such components.

Background of the Invention

10 Aluminium is produced conventionally by the Hall-Hérault process, by the electrolysis of alumina dissolved in a cryolite-based molten electrolyte at temperatures around 950°C. A Hall-Hérault reduction cell typically has a steel shell provided with an insulating lining of refractory material, which in turn has a lining of carbon which contacts the molten constituents. Conductor bars connected to the negative pole of a direct current source are embedded in the carbon cathode blocks forming the cell bottom floor. The cathode blocks are usually made of an anthracite based prebaked carbon material containing coal tar pitch as a binder joined with a ramming paste mixture of anthracite, coke, and coal tar.

25 In Hall-Hérault cells, a molten aluminium pool above the carbon blocks acts as the cathode where the reduction to aluminium takes place. The carbon lining or cathode material has a normal useful life of three to eight years, or even less under adverse conditions. The deterioration

of the cathode bottom is due to erosion and penetration of electrolyte and liquid aluminium as well as intercalation by sodium, which causes swelling and deformation of the cathode carbon blocks and ramming paste. In addition, the
5 penetration of sodium species and other ingredients of cryolite or air leads to the formation of toxic compounds including cyanides.

Difficulties in operation also arise from the accumulation of undissolved alumina sludge on the surface
10 of the carbon cathode beneath the aluminium pool which forms insulating regions on the cell bottom. Penetration of cryolite and aluminium through the carbon body and the deformation of the cathode carbon blocks also cause displacement of such cathode blocks. Due to displacement of
15 the cathode blocks, aluminium reaches the steel cathode conductor bars causing corrosion thereof leading to deterioration of the electrical contact and an excessive iron content in the aluminium metal produced.

Extensive research has been carried out with
20 Refractory Hard Metals (RHM) such as TiB_2 as cathode materials. TiB_2 and other RHM's are practically insoluble in aluminium, have a low electrical resistance, and are wetted by aluminium. This should allow aluminium to be electrolytically deposited directly on an RHM cathode
25 surface, and should avoid the necessity for a deep aluminium pool. Because titanium diboride and similar Refractory Hard Metals are wettable by aluminium, resistant to the corrosive environment of an aluminium production cell, and are good electrical conductors, numerous cell
30 designs utilizing Refractory Hard Metal have been proposed, which would present many advantages, notably including the saving of energy by reducing the ACD.

The use of titanium diboride and other RHM current-conducting elements in electrolytic aluminium production

cells is described in US Patents Nos 2,915,442, 3,028,324, 3,215,615, 3,314,876, 3,330,756, 3,156,639, 3,274,093 and 3,400,061. Despite extensive efforts and the potential advantages of having surfaces of titanium diboride at the cell cathode bottom, such propositions have not been commercially adopted by the aluminium industry.

Various types of TiB₂ or RHM layers applied to carbon substrates have failed due to poor adherence and to differences in thermal expansion coefficients between the titanium diboride material and the carbon cathode block.

US Patent N° 3,400,061 describes a cell without an aluminium pool but with a drained cathode of Refractory Hard Metal which consists of a mixture of Refractory Hard Metal, at least 5 percent carbon, and 10 to 20% by weight of pitch binder, baked at 900°C or more and rammed into place in the cell bottom. Such composite cathodes have found no commercial use probably due to susceptibility to attack by the electrolytic bath.

US Patent N° 3,661,736 claims a composite drained cathode for an aluminium production cell, comprising particles or pieces of arc-melted "RHM alloy" embedded in an electrically conductive matrix of carbon or graphite and a particulate filler such as aluminium carbide, titanium carbide or titanium nitride. However, in operation, grain boundaries and the carbon or graphite matrix are attacked by electrolyte and/or aluminium, leading to rapid destruction of the cathode.

US Patent N° 4,308,114 discloses a cathode surface of RHM in a graphitic matrix made by mixing the RHM with a pitch binder and graphitizing at 2350°C or above. Such cathodes are subject to early failure due to rapid ablation, and possible intercalation by sodium and erosion of the graphite matrix.

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U.S. Patent N° 4,466,996 proposed applying a coating composition comprising a pre-formed particulate RHM, such as TiB_2 , a thermosetting binder, a carbonaceous filler and carbonaceous additives to a carbonaceous cathode substrate, followed by curing and carbonisation. But it was still not possible by this method to obtain coatings of satisfactory adherence that could withstand the operating conditions in an aluminium production cell.

U.S. patent N° 4,595,545 discloses the production of titanium diboride or a mixture thereof with a carbide and/or a nitride of titanium, zirconium, hafnium, vanadium, niobium, tantalum, chromium, molybdenum or tungsten by carbothermic, carbo-aluminothermic or alumino-thermic reaction, under vacuum or an inert atmosphere, of a glass or microcrystalline gel of oxide reactants prepared from organic alkoxide precursors. This glass or gel was then ground and formed into bodies and sintered into bodies of titanium diboride/alumina-based materials as components of aluminium production cells. But such sintered materials are subject to attack and grain-boundary corrosion when in contact with molten aluminium. Furthermore, the method was not suitable for producing large pieces such as blocks for use as cathodes in aluminium production cells.

The use of self-propagating combustion synthesis (also called micro-pyretic reaction) to produce net shaped ceramic electrodes for use in aluminium production has been described in WO 92/13977 and WO 92/22682, wherein a particulate combustion mixture for producing a ceramic or metal-ceramic composite was mixed with particulate fillers and inorganic binders. None of these materials contained carbon.

WO93/20027 proposed producing a protective refractory coating on a substrate of carbonaceous or other

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material as component in an aluminium production cell, by applying to the substrate a micropyrretic reaction layer from a slurry containing particulate reactants in a colloidal carrier, and initiating a micropyrretic reaction.

5 The colloidal carrier was at least one of colloidal alumina, colloidal silica, colloidal yttria and colloidal monoaluminium phosphate.

WO93/25494 proposed a carbon containing

10 paste for use in particular as components of electrolytic cells as such or compacted to form anodes, cathodes and cell linings of cells for the electrolysis of alumina for the production of aluminium in Hall-Héroult cells. The paste consisted essentially of a compact mixture of one or

15 more particulate carbonaceous material(s) with a non-carbonaceous non-polluting binder and optionally with one or more fillers, the binder being a suspension of one or more colloids or being derived from one or more colloid precursors, colloid reagents or chelating agents.

20 To date, no carbon-based composite material containing a refractory hard metal boride, carbide or borocarbide has proven satisfactory for use as component of aluminium production cells. Such materials have been expensive to produce and it has been difficult to produce the materials

25 in large pieces serviceable in aluminium production cells. Moreover, the resistance of such materials to attack by melt components has been unsatisfactory.

Summary of the Invention

It is therefore an object of the invention to

30 produce a carbon-based composite material containing a refractory compound such as a refractory hard metal boride, a carbide, an oxide, a nitride or combinations or mixtures thereof that are satisfactory for use as components of aluminium production cells, in particular as cell linings.

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Another object of the invention to provide a method of economically producing such materials in large pieces that are serviceable in aluminium production cells and that have an excellent resistance to attack by melt components
5 of aluminium production cells.

The invention provides a method of producing a component of an aluminium production cell made of a carbon-based composite material containing a refractory
10 compound selected from borides, carbides, nitrides, oxides and combinations and mixtures thereof and at least one of aluminium, titanium, silicon and zirconium as metals, alloys or compounds including intermetallic compounds of these metals and compounds of these metals with other
15 elements. The aforementioned combinations include borocarbides, and oxycompounds such as oxynitrides.

The method according to the invention comprises firstly providing a reaction mixture of aluminium, titanium, silicon and/or zirconium and precursors which react to form the refractory compound such as a
20 boride, carbide or borocarbide or mixtures thereof, and optional fillers and additives. The reaction mixture is then mixed with particulate carbon preferably in an amount of from 1 to 20 parts by weight of carbon for 1 part by weight of the reaction mixture; and preferably with a
25 colloidal binder containing at least one of colloidal silica, alumina, yttria, ceria, thoria, zirconia, magnesia, lithia, the amount of the colloidal binder being sufficient to fully wet and "wrap" the carbon particles. The resulting mixture is pressed or compacted into shape by other well
30 known methods such as extrusion, and dried and heated to initiate reaction of the reaction mixture by a self-propagating micropyretic reaction which proceeds along a combustion front which sweeps through the shape.

The reaction product is particularly advantageous
35 when used as cell side wall or lining of an aluminium

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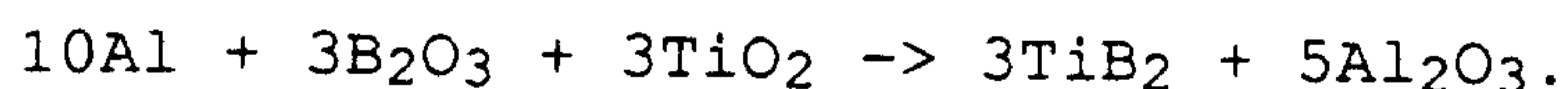
production cell, on account of its good wettability by molten aluminium and its good oxidation resistance. The production method by self-propagating combustion synthesis or micropyretic reaction lends itself to making large
5 blocks of the material or entire cell bottoms.

In applications where high strength is required to obtain a self-sustaining body, titanium, silicon and/or zirconium will be preferred in the reaction mixture. The resulting product can contain elemental titanium, silicon
10 and zirconium as well as intermetallic compounds and compounds like titanium carbide, titanium nitride, silicon carbide, silicon nitride and silicon carbide alone or with the elemental metals, alloys or intermetallic compounds. Mixtures of these metals with aluminium are also
15 contemplated, resulting in intermetallic compounds such as AlTi and AlTi₃. The inclusion of titanium has also been found to increase the material's electrical conductivity.

Detailed Description Of The Invention

The reaction mixture is typically mixed with from
20 1.5 to 8 parts by weight of carbon for one part by weight of the reaction mixture, advantageously from 3 to 6 parts by weight of carbon for one part by weight of the reaction mixture. This reaction mixture and carbon are then mixed usually with from 0.1ml to 1ml of colloidal binder per gram
25 of the reaction mixture and carbon, and preferably with from 0.15ml to 0.5ml of colloidal binder per gram of the reaction mixture.

A preferred reaction mixture comprises aluminium, boron oxide and titanium dioxide at least approximately in
30 the molar ratio for the reaction scheme :



The colloidal binder, which is advantageously colloidal alumina, may be derived from colloid precursors or colloid reagents which are solutions of at least one

salt such as chlorides, sulfates, nitrates, chlorates, perchlorates or metal organic compounds such as alkoxides, formates, acetates of silicon, aluminium, yttrium, cerium, thorium, zirconium, magnesium, lithium and other metals and mixtures thereof. The binder may contain a chelating agent such as acetyl acetone or ethylacetoacetate.

The aforementioned colloid precursor or reagent solutions of metal organic compounds are principally metal alkoxides of the general formula $M(OR)_z$ where M is a metal or complex cation, R is an alkyl chain and z is a number usually from 1 to 12.

The resulting carbon-based composite material usually contains at least 50% weight of carbon, and in most cases from 70 to 85% weight of carbon.

The starting material may comprise one or more fillers selected from metallic, intermetallic, semi-metallic, polymeric, refractory and/or pre-formed ceramic materials such as borides, carbides, nitrides, silicides, oxides, oxynitrides, as well as pyrolyzable chlorosilanes, polycarbosilanes, polysilanes and other organometallic polymers which pyrolyze to useful products for oxidation prevention or enhancing bonding, or their pyrolyzed products; thermosetting resins; thermoplastic resins; and mixtures thereof.

Examples of thermosetting resins are epoxides, phenolic resins and polyimides. Examples of thermoplastic resins are polycarbonates, eg. LexanTM, polyphenylene sulfides, polyether ether ketones, polysulfones, eg. UdelTM, polyetherimides and polyethersulfones.

Some materials may be present both as binders and as fillers. For instance, alumina in colloidal form can be present in the binder, while particulate alumina may be included as a filler.

The particulate carbonaceous materials are preferably selected from petroleum coke, metallurgical coke, anthracite, graphite or any other form of crystalline carbons, amorphous carbon or a mixture thereof, usually
5 anthracite, metallurgical coke, graphite and other carbon materials for the production of cathodes. Preferred materials are anthracite and graphite. Additionally, the carbon may be a fullerene such as fullerene C₆₀ or C₇₀ or of a related family. Mixtures of these different forms of
10 carbon can also be used.

The size of the particulate carbonaceous material is usually below 40mm, preferably between 1 micrometer and 30mm, and the particulate carbonaceous material preferably contains between 5 weight% and 40 weight% of particles
15 having a size below 0.2mm.

However, the starting mixture of the invention may contain particulate carbonaceous material, fillers or binders that are fibrous, both discrete (chopped) fibers and continuous or discontinuous lengths of fibers. Fibers
20 have the advantage of enhancing bonding and improving toughness, hence the solidity of the resulting bodies or masses. Mixtures of powders and fibers are also contemplated.

After making a block or mass, before serving as
25 cell component, the block or mass may be subjected to an impregnation with a colloid based slurry and heated again. Such impregnation is preferably preceded by and followed by a heat treatment.

It is also possible to coat the block or mass with
30 a coating of desired composition including, in particular for cathode applications, coatings of an aluminium wettable material such as titanium diboride or other refractory metal borides, carbides, nitrides etc., or to bond layers of such materials to the block or mass.

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For carbon blocks or masses subject to oxidizing or corrosive environments, the coating may be a protective coating which improves the resistance of the body to oxidation, and which may also enhance the bodies electrical conductivity and/or its electrochemical activity, such coating being applied from a colloidal slurry containing reactant or non-reactant substances, or a mixture of reactant and non-reactant substances, which when the body is heated to a sufficient elevated temperature react and/or sinter to form the protective coating. Such coatings, which in preferred compositions comprise carbides, silicides, borides, nitrides, oxides, nitrides, carbonitrides, oxynitrides and combinations of these, in particular SiC and MoSi₂, possibly together with metallic particles such as for example Ni, Pt, Al, Cr or intermetallic particles such as for example NiAl, NiAl₃, CrSi, CrB etc. or combinations thereof, as well as the reaction products of micropyretic agents which are particles, fibers or foils of materials such as Ni, Al, Ti, B, Si, Nb, C, Cr₂O₃, Zr, Ta, TiO₂, B₂O₃, Fe or combinations, are described in WO93/20026.

A preferred coating comprises particulate borides such as TiB₂ in colloidal alumina, as described in WO93/25494.

Where enhanced wettability is required, it can be useful to bond tiles, plates slabs or other bodies of an aluminium RHM or an RHM composite material onto a carbon-based composite material according to the invention, using known bonding agents or an improved slurry as described in Canadian Patent Application No. 2,155,203.

The invention will be further illustrated in the following examples.

Example I

A combustion mixture was prepared by mixing 37.6 wt% aluminium powder (99.5 pure, -325 mesh), 29 wt% purified B₂O₃ (1 micron) and 33.4 wt% titanium dioxide (99+ pure grade, -300 mesh). 10.5g of this combustion mixture was then mixed thoroughly with 19.5g of anthracite powder (-80 mesh). 10.5 ml of a colloidal alumina binder (Grade WAL-12 from Messrs. Wesbond, containing 12wt% colloids) were added to the mixture and stirred thoroughly so that all anthracite particles are wrapped with the slurry. During this mixing, the slurry warms. After waiting about 20 minutes for the slurry to cool, the mixture is pressed at 560 k/cm² in a die of 1 inch (2.54 cm) diameter to produce a cylinder. Soon after removal from the die, a micropycritic reaction is initiated by quickly placing the cylinder in a furnace at 1150°C for about 10 minutes. Immediately after reaction, the cylinder is immersed in carbon powder for about a half hour to prevent oxidation, then allowed to cool in air. The product after the micropycritic reaction contained TiB₂, alumina and carbonaceous materials. In an electrolytic cell test with NaF/NaCl₂ baths, the product worked well and did not disintegrate, whereas a conventional carbon cathode material completely disintegrated.

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Example II

A combustion mixture was prepared by mixing 26.3 wt% aluminium powder (99.5 pure, -325 mesh), 20.4 wt% purified B₂O₃ (1 micron), 23.35 wt% titanium dioxide (-300 mesh, 99+ pure grade), and 30 wt% anthracite (-80 mesh). 15g of this combustion mixture was then mixed thoroughly with 15g anthracite powder (-80 mesh). 7.5 ml of a colloidal alumina binder (Grade AL-20 from Nycol Products containing 30% colloids) were added to the mixture and stirred thoroughly so that all anthracite particles are

wrapped with the slurry. During this mixing, the slurry warms. After waiting about 15 minutes for the slurry to cool, the mixture is pressed at 100-175 k/cm² in a die of 1 inch (2.54 cm) diameter to produce a cylinder. Micropyretic
5 reaction is initiated by quickly placing the cylinder in a furnace at 1100°C for about 10 minutes. Immediately after reaction, the cylinder is immersed in carbon powder for about a half hour to prevent oxidation, then allowed to cool in air. The product after the micropyrethic reaction
10 contained TiB₂, alumina and carbonaceous materials. In an electrolytic cell test with a NaF/NaCl₂ molten bath, the product worked well and did not disintegrate, whereas a conventional carbon cathode material completely disintegrated.

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Example III

Example I was repeated but with air drying of the cylinder for 24 hours after removing the cylinder from the die and before placing it in the furnace. The result was similar.

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Example IV

Example I was repeated but using instead 19.5 g of graphite powder, -300 mesh. The result was similar.

THE EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION IN WHICH AN EXCLUSIVE PROPERTY OR PRIVILEGE IS CLAIMED ARE DEFINED AS FOLLOWS:

1. A method of producing a component of an aluminium production cell made of a carbon-based composite material containing carbon and a refractory compound selected from borides, carbides, oxides, nitrides and combinations and mixtures thereof, and at least one of aluminium, titanium, silicon and zirconium, and alloys and compounds thereof, the method comprising

- providing a micropyretic reaction mixture which after reaction contains the refractory compound, the reaction mixture comprising at least one of aluminium, titanium, silicon and zirconium as reactant,

- mixing the reaction mixture with particulate carbon and with optional fillers and with a binder, followed by compacting; and

- initiating a micropyretic reaction to produce the carbon-based composite material,

characterized in that the reaction mixture with particulate carbon is mixed with a colloidal binder containing at least one of colloidal silica, alumina, yttria, ceria, thoria, zirconia, magnesia, lithia, the amount of the colloidal binder being sufficient to fully wet the carbon particles.

2. The method of claim 1, comprising mixing the reaction mixture with particulate carbon in an amount of from 1 to 20 parts by weight of carbon for 1 part by weight of the reaction mixture, and with the colloidal binder, compacting and drying the mixture; and heating to initiate a micropyretic reaction which sweeps through the reaction mixture along a combustion front.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the reaction mixture is mixed with from 1.5 to 8 parts by weight of

carbon for one part by weight of the reaction mixture.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the reaction mixture is mixed with from 3 to 6 parts by weight of carbon for one part by weight of the reaction mixture.

5. The method of claim 2, 3, or 4, wherein the reaction mixture and carbon are mixed with from 0.1ml to 1ml of the colloidal binder per gram of the reaction mixture and carbon.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the reaction mixture and carbon are mixed with from 0.15ml to 0.5ml of the colloidal binder per gram of the reaction mixture and carbon.

7. The method of any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein the particulate carbon is anthracite or graphite.

8. The method of any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein the reaction mixture comprises aluminium, boron oxide and titanium dioxide in the molar ratio: $10\text{Al} : 3\text{B}_2\text{O}_3 : 3\text{TiO}_2$.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the colloidal binder is colloidal alumina.

10. The method of any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein the colloidal binder is derived from colloid precursors or colloid reagents which are solutions of at least one salt selected from chlorides, sulfates, nitrates, chlorates, perchlorates or metal organic compounds selected from alkoxides, formates, acetates of silicon, aluminium, yttrium, cerium, thorium, zirconium, magnesium, lithium and mixtures thereof.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the binder contains acetyl acetone or ethylacetoacetate as a chelating agent.

12. The method of claim 10, wherein the solutions of metal organic compounds are of the general formula $M(OR)_z$, where M is a metal or complex cation, R is an alkyl chain and z is a number from 1 to 12.

13. The method of any one of claims 1 to 12, wherein the resulting carbon-based composite material contains at least 50% weight of carbon.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the resulting carbon-based composite material contains from 70 to 85% weight of carbon.

15. The method of any one of claims 1 to 14, wherein the resulting carbon-based composite material is coated with a coating or covered with a bonded layer of an aluminium-wettable refractory material.

16. A component of an aluminium production cell made of a pitch-free carbon-based composite material containing carbon and a refractory compound selected from borides, carbides, oxides, nitrides and combinations and mixtures thereof, and at least one of aluminium, titanium, silicon and zirconium and alloys and compounds thereof, said composite material being obtained by micropyretic reaction along a combustion front through a mixture comprising a reaction mixture of at least one of aluminium, titanium, silicon and zirconium and precursors which react to form the refractory compound, and optional fillers and binders, mixed with particulate carbon,

characterized in that the component is obtained from a mixture comprising: particulate carbon in an amount of from 1 to 20 parts by weight of carbon for 1 part by weight of the reaction mixture; and a colloidal binder containing at least one of colloidal silica, alumina, yttria, ceria, thoria, zirconia, magnesia and lithia which wets the carbon particles.

17. The cell component of claim 16, wherein the composite material comprises titanium diboride, alumina and carbonaceous material.

18. The cell component of claim 16 or 17, wherein the composite material comprises at least 50% weight of carbon.

19. The cell component of claim 16 or 17, wherein the composite material comprises at least 70 to 85% weight of carbon.

20. The cell component of any one of claims 16 to 19, wherein the carbon-based composite material is coated with a coating or covered with a bonded layer of an aluminium-wettable refractory material.

21. An aluminium production cell comprising a component according to any one of claims 16 to 20, which component is a cell bottom and/or a cell lining.