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### [PITCHBLENDE PROCESSING DEVELOPMENT] |PRELIMINARY TESTS ON OLIVER FILTER, BATCHES S-104 INCLUSIVE

#### By C. F. Ritchie

#### INTRODUCTION

The writer's experience with the filtration of the residues from the digestion of AAA ores began about the time that the so-called No. 3 process was inaugurated in the pilot plant. This consisted of adding nitric acid to the ore slurry, followed by the addition of barium nitrate solution, then sufficient sulfuric acid to precipitate (theoretically) the added barium and the lead content of the ore. (Note: In Batch S the barium was added as  $BaCO_3$  with the ore slurry.)

At the time, the experimental Oliver filter was being employed for separating the solids from the digestion liquor, and this machine was employed in all of the tests described in this memo. Later, the filtration work was transferred to the experimental Feinc filter (see subsequent memo on that work.)

All work reported in this memo was done on ore lot (P-29961-LA.)

#### OUTLINE OF TESTS

The subject matter of this report may be divided into three phases, viz:

1. Filtration tests of sludge at low temperatures  $(140-160^{\circ}F)$  — necessitated by limitations of the then available filtration media. (Tests S, T, U.)

2. Filtration tests at higher temperatures  $(190-210^{\circ}F)$ —using high temperature, acid resisting fabrics. (Tests V-Z incl.)

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3. Filtration tests on an altered residue, also at high temperatures. The change of character of the residue was brought about by altering the processing steps, so that the ore was added to the acid, instead of the opposite procedure.

#### DISCUSSION

#### 1. Low Temperature Filtration

At the time, the only suitable acid-resisting filter medium available was the common variety of Vinyon filter cloth, which cannot be used at temperatures above about  $160^{\circ}F$ —over that temperature, partial plasticity and profound shrinkage sets in.

In reporting these early tests, facts pertaining to the nature of the cakes, their acceptance of wash water, etc., are of greater interest than quantitative data.

The outstanding characteristic of the filter cakes produced in runs S, T, and U was the "softness" of said cakes. Attempts to apply wash water to the filter resulted in pronounced channeling or erosion of the cake—a slight excess of water easily sluiced the cake from the drum. Somewhat better results were obtained when "drag cloths" were installed to spread the water, but these smeared the cake badly, and did not stop the erosion entirely.

For the benefit of the record, it should be stated here that these sludges or residues were by no means unfilterable. On the contrary, cakes of  $\frac{1}{8}$  to  $\frac{3}{16}$  inch thickness were formed in about two minutes of submergence at 20'' - 24'' vacuum, and in one instance, at least, (Batch U) the projected time for the filtration was well within the time allowable; namely, 200 minutes.

The cakes were, however, almost unwashable (within times allowable) for the reasons already noted. This fact was obvious from a visual inspection of the cake being discharged from the machine. From  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the depth of the cake was still strongly colored by the entrained liquor, even when maximum quantities of wash water had been applied.

#### 2. High Temperature Filtration

Between August 3 and August 6, 1945, several changes were made to the Oliver filter setup. A group of six mail-volume sprays (0.07 gpm each) were mounted over the filter drum on long flexible copper tubes.

These were placed so that their distances from the cake could be easily and quickly changed, and also so that their relative peripheral spacing could be altered. Each was fitted with a separate cock,—any number could be employed.

Also, there was obtained at this time a new Vinyon fabric, known as the "N" grade, capable of withstanding not only the acids involved, but also boiling temperatures. In tests, V, W & X, a very heavy tightly woven fabric called Vinyon 101N was used to dress the filter.

Means were installed to keep the contents of the filter bowl at  $190-210^{\circ}$ F, and run V performed. The resulting cake showed considerable improvement over the previous cakes formed at lower-temperature. Either by virtue of the improved cake or the new sprays (or both), the cake appeared to accept water better. It could be kept pretty well flooded with a considerably lessened tendency toward erosion. Despite this, visual inspection showed that nothing approaching complete washing was being obtained, and this was, of course, substantiated by later analyses. The best cake picked from the Oliver filter in test V showed almost 10% X, dry basis.

Rate of filtration was quite acceptable; the 77 gallon batch containing 150 pounds of X filtered in a projected time of 100 minutes. Note: The pilot filter is to the proposed plant filter as the 150 pound X batch is to the proposed plant batch, and the "safe" time allowed for filtration in the proposed plant schedule is 200 minutes.

It should be noted here for the benefit of the record, if nothing else, that these high temperature "free filtering" cakes exhibited a marked tendency toward cracking. Also it was noted that the cakes that cracked the most showed the best filtration characteristics.

Fortunately, it was found that the cracks could be sealed quite effectively by the application of the wash water. In this respect, the soft or erosive nature of the cake was of positive value, as it enabled us to sluice enough solid matter from the surface of the cake into the cracks to permit further filtration and washing. On the other hand, this operation always comprised a compromise between the application of too little wash water, resulting in profound cake cracking, and too much wash water, resulting in profound erosion. Any suggestion that these cakes be filtered and "sucked dry" (without washing) was out of the question because of this cracking tendency. Note: The latter might constitute a possible means of operation when combined with a sufficiently generous repulping operation.

Test W was a duplication of test V. However, the time (262 minutes) required to filter the batch was over twice that encountered in batch V. That this was due to blinding of the heavy 101N Vinyon cloth could be readily seen by the "spotty" nature of the cake on the various areas of the panel sections.

The average cake thickness was, of course, considerably less in test W than in test V, and as a result, somewhat better washing was encountered. The 7.3% X, dry basis, exhibited by the cake from test W is the best yet found.

The 248 pounds of wet gelatinous cake collected from the first filtration (but not including the "heal" from the Oliver bowl) was repulped in 19 gallons of water, and the resulting 40 gallons of slurry again filtered. The drum was operated at the same rate in both filtrations—6 minutes per revolution. To further study the matter of cloth blinding, the filtration was stopped during the run and the fabric thoroughly scrubbed. Cake thickness increased appreciably following said cleansing, but blinding had set in again before the run was completed.

Again, largely due to the slow filtration rate (thin cake) the washing of the repulp cake was the best yet encountered. Said cake contained only 4.4% X, dry basis. It might, under perfect conditions, have been washed as low as 1.4% X. In other words, soluble X to the extent of 3.0%, dry basis, could still have been washed out. This is decidedly not good operation.

Before making test X, the heavy 101N Vinyon cover was removed, washed and replaced. At the same drum speed employed in the prior test (6 m.p.r.), the filtration rate was not very different, considering the greater volume of this latter batch. (Some one was apparently "heavy-handed" with the water hose.) Washing was poorer than obtained on the previous run. The data sheet said "Some blinding; cake washed off."

At this point, or even before, it had become obvious that the matter of cloth blinding was most critical. In fact, unless some means were found to circumvent it, the commercial operation of the process was doomed to failure. Microscopic examination of the 101N Vinyon showed it to be composed of large cords (fibro bundles) closely woven, forming rather deep pockets in which the slime could easily lodge. Increased air pressure on the filter discharge (1.5 lb. while blowing) failed to effect a cure. Back washing or even continual brushing seemed out of the question.

In searching for a better weave, a piece of Vinyon 119N was finally obtained. This is a medium weight cloth of the same high temperature acid resisting fiber. It has a much smoother surface finish (microscopically) and it was hoped that it might be the answer to the dilemma.

Accordingly, for test Y, the Oliver was dressed with this new cloth. The filtration appeared fairly satisfactory, although subsequent analyses showed no further improvement in washing efficiency, either upon first filtration or upon repulp. Incidentally, at this point, the practice or repulping in dilute (1%-2%) nitric acid was inaugurated.

In test Z, the drum speed was reduced somewhat to allow more time for washing, as the previous test had shown this new setup capable of filtering the batch well within the allowable 200 minutes. At said lower speed, a fairly well washed first cake was obtained, -3.2% X.

Upon repulp the X content was further reduced to 1.6%, which is the best recorded result to date. However, it will be noted that, even at the high drum speed of 3 minutes per revolution, an excessive filtration time was again encountered. This again indicated cloth blinding.

#### 3. Changing the Character of the Residue

To this point, considerable progress had been made. Use of higher filtration temperatures and the selection of a more suitable cover had resulted in improved filtration behavior. Despite this, it was apparent that the problem of cover blinding was still with us. Notwithstanding the better surface of the 119N fabric, severe blinding was again encountered upon the fourth use of the new fabric.

Likewise, while considerable improvement had been made in the quality and washability of the cake, there was still much to be desired. While the high-temperature cake accepted wash water better, a wash approaching perfection was seldom achieved, even with a clean freefiltering cover. Furthermore, a point not shown by the unadorned data sheets: Even this improved high temperature cake was far from foolproof. In other words, it was a soft, gelatinous cake, which could be easily eroded and washed off the drum by the application of excessive quantities of water. With the urgency for complete washing which exists, this is an unhappy feature to translate into full scale usage.

With those facts in mind, it was decided to conduct a series of experiments to the end of altering the nature of the precipitate, specifically, to try to eliminate its bulky, gelatinous characteristics. Apparently, much of the silicious matter of AAA ore is reprecipitated during

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the digestion as silicic acid. In past practice a pronounced thickening of the slurry was invariably noted as the latter part of the nitric acid charge was added to the slurry of ground ore and water.

It was postulated that the addition of the ore to nitric acid should result in a denser form of precipitated silicic acid. A denser cake should hold less X values, purely by virtue of mechanical entrainment, it should be more amenable to the application of water, and it might possibly wash better and cling to the cloth less.

With these desiderata in mind, tests 101-103 were made, adding the ore to the nitric acid. Upon completion of the digestion, entire freedom from the thickening phenomenon was apparent.

To show conclusively that the reduced bulk of the precipitate, and of the filter cake, were the results of procedural changes, rather than of some change in the ore, batch 104 was made up as a duplicate of batches Y and Z. As expected, the gelatinous bulky cake of prior practice resulted.

As just indicated, cakes formed on the filter in tests 101-103 inclusive were much less bulky and much more amenable to the mechanical application of wash water than cakes of prior practice. Visually, the cakes, even from the first (digestion) filtration, were well washed. All data sheets stated that the color of the liquor was well displaced. Because of poor manipulation of the 100 cc samples, poor laboratory results, or "reversion" peculiarities, a rigorous comparison of the washing efficiency (analytically) is impossible. If we can take the "insoluble X" value of 5.1% (step 5) of test 101 as gospel, the washing upon first filtration was complete in this test. Also, in test 102, we find that the first filtration cake had only 0.9% X, against a base of 0.4%. Just why the 100 cc samples of the repulp showed 2.6% X with a washed repulp cake of 2.5% X can only be explained by poor sampling, bad analyses or reversion. The latter is entirely possible. It is the moreso when it is remembered that this experimental Oliver "spit-back" an awful lot of strong liquor with the discharge cake, (Cake samples, for record, avoided this spit-back.)

Despite the fact that the new type precipitate behaved much better than the former gelatinous precipitate (a fact more apparent from observation than from recorded results) the rate of filtration still left considerable to be desired. Not one of these digestion slurries filtered within the allotted 200 minutes.

It was the firm belief of those in charge of operations that this cake should filter at a reasonable rate. Failure to do so was believed to lie solely in the phenomenon already discussed at considerable length: cloth blinding. So, rather than pursue that problem further in connection with the Oliver filter (time was short) it was decided to transfer the test work to the Feinc filter.

The Feinc filter had previously been ruled out because its cake rollers, wash belt, string discharge, etc., would not operate with the soft gelatinous cake of prior practice. The new precipitate would, however, undoubtedly behave on the Feinc. Given a chance of "mechanical" success, insofar as cake formation and discharge were concerned, it was believed that the Feinc had a very good chance of solving the one remaining filtration stumbling block-cloth blinding. This subsequently proved to be the case.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Oliver filter was tested quite extensively on two types of precipitate resulting from the digestion of AAA ore, and its subsequent treatments.

The solids resulting from digestions wherein the acid was added to the ore slurry were of a bulky gelatinous nature.

When this precipitate was filtered at lower temperature  $(140-180^{\circ}F)$  good cakes were formed, but these were so very soft that application of wash water was virtually impossible.

By filtering the same sludge at higher temperature  $(190-210^{\circ}F)$ some improvement was attained, with respect to the acceptance of wash water. However, the improvement was not sufficient to guarantee full freedom from the cake erosion difficulties encountered when applying wash water to the cake on the drum.

Even if operations could have been further improved with respect to completeness of washing, it was felt that this type of precipitate would not be of commercial utility. Between the minimum quantity of water required to keep cake cracks sealed, and the maximum quantity of water which resulted in severe cake erosion, there existed only a relatively small leeway.

A second type of precipitate was produced by adding the ore to the acid. This formed a much denser non-gelatinous filter cake which had

much less cracking tendency and accepted water better. Being much less "soft" application of wash water had far less tendency to erode this cake, i.e., to wash it off the drum.

Throughout all of these tests, the problem of filter cloth blinding or sliming was recognized as an outstanding stumbling block. Several types of cloth were tested and some improvement was noted. However, neither different cloths nor improvements of the type of precipitate eliminated the blinding troubles sufficiently for us to feel secure in handing the process over to plant operation. All cloths operating on all precipitates blended badly after a few short runs.

Experience in the industry is the effect that sliming (cloth blinding) precipitates are best handled on very light weight cloths. Such fabric is impractical on a filter of the Oliver type, where cake discharge depends upon back-blowing to loosen the cake, followed by its removal against a "doctor knife" on a taught wire.

On the other hand, the Feinc filter is organized to operate with light weight cloths, — no back blow or doctor knives are employed. Previously, the Feinc string discharge filter had been ruled out for handling the soft precipitate, but with the discovery of the technique for preparing a dense precipitate, it was believed that the Feinc could now be made to operate.

If the Feinc could be made to handle the precipitate (mechanically) there was a very good chance that, by virtue of its different organization from the Oliver, we might be able to solve the cloth blinding problem. To this problem, there seemed to be no practical solution in connection with the Oliver.

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K-1-E PILOT PLANT SUMMARY SHEETS DIGESTION AND FILTRATION

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DUPLICATE OF "T"



8-6-45 K-1-E PILOT PLANT SUMMARY SHEETS DIGESTION AND DIVISION

IT HI TEMP RUN ON OLIVER



8-8-45 K-1-E PILOT PLANT SUMMARY SHEETS DIGESTION AND FILTRATION

DUPLICATE OF V (CLOTH BLINDING)

## Batch\_W\_\_\_\_









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K-1-E PILOT PLANT SUMMARY SHEETS DIGESTION AND FILTRATION

CHANGE DIGESTION: - ORE TO ACID (CONC.)





K-1-E PILOT PLANT SUMMARY SHEETS DIGESTION AND FILTRATION

Batch 102 ORE TO DILUTE FICID. FILTER TESTS - OLIVER



8-22-45

K-1-E PILOT PLANT SUMMARY SHEETS DIGESTION AND FILTRATION

Batch\_103

# ORE TO STRONG ACID. OLIVER TESTS.



