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EVALUATION OF REINFORCING BARS IN OLD REINFORCED CONCRETE STRUCTURES

A SERVICE OF THE CONCRETE REINFORCING STEEL INSTITUTE

INTRODUCTION

Most practicing structural engineers sooner or later face the task of evaluating old structures. This task is always an interesting challenge, because it is never a routine application of the current practice in design. Owners commonly require re-evaluation when planning a change in building usage, restoration, additional stories, or lateral additions in any combination. Frequently, the original contract documents, the "as-built" revisions, and so on, cannot be found.

The structural engineering challenge is two-fold. First, the material properties must be determined for the concrete. The concrete can and usually does gain 25 percent or more strength than it had at 28 days, but the concrete can also have deteriorated under fire or chemical exposures. The second challenge concerns the reinforcing bars — determining the yield strength, the bar sizes and their cross-sectional areas, the locations of the bars, effective depths of structural members, the bending and cut-off details of the bars, and development lengths (bond and anchorage).

Where documentation is lacking for the existing structure, the following abbreviated history of reinforcing bars may be a useful starting point.

Reference 1 is an excellent presentation on the history of reinforced concrete. Included in the article are illustrations of a variety of patented reinforcing bars, and an extensive list of references regarding codes, design and construction, and reports on landmark tests.

REINFORCING BARS — SPECIFICATIONS, BAR SIZES AND ALLOWABLE STRESSES

Specifications. Reinforcing bars, as we know them today, came about in 1900. Specifications were first developed by the Association of American Steel Manufacturers in 1910. The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) adopted standard specification A15 for billet-steel concrete reinforcing bars in 1911. Reinforcing bars were plain and deformed in structural, intermediate and hard grades (minimum yield strengths), or deformed, cold-twisted. Structural grade (minimum f_y = 33,000 psi) was normally used, unless otherwise specified. The specified minimum yield strengths of structural, intermediate, and hard grades were 33,000, 40,000, and 50,000 psi, respectively. The minimum yield strength of cold twisted bars was specified at 55,000 psi.

ASTM also issued similar specifications for rail-steel (A16) and axle-steel (A160) reinforcing bars. The minimum yield strength for rail-steel bars was 50,000 psi, and for axle-steel bars the same as for billet steel bars.

Table 1 summarizes the ASTM specifications for reinforcing bars from 1911 to the present.

Bar Sizes. Table 2 shows the standard reinforcing bar sizes recommended by the Joint Committee on Standard Specifications for Concrete and Reinforced Concrete in its 1924 Report (Reference 2).

Allowable Stresses. Some early authorities stated that allowable stresses in tension in the reinforcement higher than 12,000 psi show "very little to be gained in economy" and recommended a maximum of 14,000 psi (Reference 3). Recommended allowable stresses in tension in the 1924 Joint Committee Report (Reference 2) were:

- 16,000 psi for structural grade and rail-steel bars
- 18,000 psi for intermediate and hard grade bars and twisted bars.

In its 1940 Report, the Joint Committee increased its recommended allowable stresses to:

Tension

- 18,000 psi for structural grade bars
- 20,000 psi for intermediate and hard grades or rail-steel bars
- 16,000 psi for all web reinforcement

Compression

- 16,000 psi for intermediate grade bars
- 20,000 psi for hard grade or rail-steel bars