CURIE TEMPERATURE OF A NON-IDENTIFIED METASTABLE PHASE IN THE AS-CAST AND ANNEALED Fe-(Nd+MM)-B ALLOYS (MM=MISCHMETAL)

C. S. Alves\(^1\), P. R. Mei\(^2\), S. Gama\(^3\) and E. M. Ammar\(^3\)
Centro de Tecnologia de Maringá, Universidade Estadual de Maringá – UEM
Maringá – PR - Brasil - 87060-080 - e-mail: cleber@deq.uem.br
Faculdade de Engenharia Mecânica – Universidade Estadual de Campinas – UNICAMP
Campinas – SP – Brasil – 13083-970 – e-mail: pmei@fem.unicamp.br
Instituto de Física Gleb Wataghin – Universidade Estadual de Campinas – UNICAMP
Campinas – SP – Brasil – 13083-970 – e-mail: gama@ifi.unicamp.br

ABSTRACT
The partial replacement of neodymium by cerium-rich Brazilian Mischmetal (MM) in as-cast and annealed Fe-(Nd+MM)-B alloys was studied using XRD (XRD), thermomagnetic analysis (TMA), electron microprobe analysis and metallography. The compositions of the alloys studied were: Fe\(_{75}\)Nd\(_{7.5}\)MM\(_{7.5}\)B\(_8\), Fe\(_{74}\)Nd\(_{10}\)MM\(_{10}\)B\(_6\), Fe\(_{74}\)Nd\(_9\)MM\(_{9}\)B\(_8\), Fe\(_{75}\)Nd\(_9\)MM\(_{9}\)B\(_7\) and Fe\(_{75}\)Nd\(_{15}\)B\(_8\). These alloys were prepared by arc melting, starting from 99.9 weight % pure primary materials, and annealed at 1100 ºC for 7 days. The metallography and XRD revealed that the microstructures of these alloys consist of a 14:2:1 matrix (i.e., Fe\(_{14}\)(Nd,MM)\(_2\)B), a MM-rich phase and another phase whose composition is Fe\(_2\)MM for the Fe\(_{74}\)Nd\(_{10}\)MM\(_{10}\)B\(_6\) alloy and Fe\(_4\)MMB\(_4\) for the others. The TMA for all MM containing alloys showed that the Curie temperature for the matrix was around 285ºC. The TMA also revealed the existence of a metastable ferromagnetic phase in all alloys, including the Fe\(_{77}\)Nd\(_{15}\)B\(_8\) commercial alloy, with a \(T_c\) around 445 ºC, and an intensity that was as high as that of the 14:2:1 matrix. The signal of this metastable phase disappeared when the alloy was heated over 500 ºC in spite of the 1100C annealing temperature. After some heating/cooling measurement cycles from room temperature to 450 ºC, it was verified that the signal from the metastable decreased while that from the 14:2:1 phase increased.

Keywords: Magnetism, Fe-Nd-B, Mischmetal, Curie temperature

1 INTRODUCTION
It is known that the magnets of Fe\(_{14}\)Nd\(_2\)B announced by Sagawa [1] and Croat [2] in 1984 have a great importance commercially and that the main technological challenges for its production are dominant. One very important aspect corresponds to the fact that these magnets use pure Neodymium usually in combination with other pure rare earths, which are added for improvements of specific characteristics [3-7]. A research perspective in these materials corresponds to the substitution of the pure rare earths by Mischmetal, which is cheaper and available in reasonable quantities in Brazil. The partial substitution of Nd by Mischmetal in the 14:2:1 compound has been studied with reports of encouraging results [8-16]. Alves [16] studied the substitution of Nd by Brazilian MM in as-cast alloys and reported that the substitution is plausible up to 50%. In this work, samples of nominal composition Fe-(Nd\(_{0.5}\)MM\(_{0.5}\))-B were prepared with different concentrations of Fe and B. The purpose of the present investigation was to determine the possible effects of these variations, as well as of the annealing treatment, on the microstructure and \(T_c\) of the 14:2:1 compound. Results are compared with the properties of the Fe\(_{77}\)Nd\(_{15}\)B\(_8\) commercial alloy.

2 EXPERIMENTAL
The samples were prepared by arc melting from 99.9% purity starting elements on a water-cooled copper boat, under a purified argon atmosphere. The composition of the Mischmetal was Ce 56%, La 18%, Nd 13%, Pr 5%, Y 2%, Fe 2% and 4% of other rare earth elements (Wt. %). To guarantee a good homogeneity in the samples, each sample was melted three times. For the annealing treatment, these ingots were wrapped in Ta foil and sealed under argon atmosphere in quartz capsules. These were then placed in a furnace and held at 1100ºC...
for one week after which, they were removed from the furnace and quenched into room temperature water. The microstructural observations were carried out using optical microscopes with samples polished in a abrasive liquid of 0.25µm. The microprobe analysis was done in a JEOL device, model JXA using 20 kV. For XRD (XRD) and thermomagnetic analysis (TMA) the samples were hand ground followed by ball-milling to around 30µm in a protective liquid of cyclohexane and then dried in a vacuum chamber [17]. The Curie temperatures were determined using a device that was built in our laboratory [18], which can do measurements up to 1000°C at a rate of 50 K/min.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As shown in Figure 1, the as-cast and the heat treated alloys contain a major phase Fe\textsubscript{14}MM\textsubscript{2}B (A), a rare earth rich phase (B), and a third phase (C) for which the microprobe analysis revealed a composition close to the Fe\textsubscript{2}Ce phase for the Fe\textsubscript{74}Nd\textsubscript{10}MM\textsubscript{10}B\textsubscript{6} alloy and for the others a composition similar to the Fe\textsubscript{4}NdB\textsubscript{4} paramagnetic compound.

These results are not in agreement with those by Alves [16] who reported the existence of the 2:1 phase only for alloys with more than 50% Nd substituted by MM. Besides, for all annealed samples, except for the Fe\textsubscript{77}Nd\textsubscript{7.5}MM\textsubscript{7.5}B\textsubscript{8} alloy (whose results are similar to those obtained for the Fe\textsubscript{77}Nd\textsubscript{5}B\textsubscript{8} alloy), the grains of the rare earth phase (C) were bigger than those in the as-cast alloys. In the same way, all the alloys presented intense magnetic domains (figures 1(b) and 1(d)) confirming the conservation of the magnetic anisotropy. All these results were confirmed by XRD. Figure 2 exhibits the XRD pattern for the as-cast Fe\textsubscript{77}Nd\textsubscript{10}MM\textsubscript{10}B\textsubscript{6} alloy. It reveals the existence of a large number of peaks corresponding to the 14:2:1 compound in addition to a fewer number of peaks with angles close to those from the Fe\textsubscript{2}Ce phase (extra peaks), as reported by Alves [16], which are related to Fe\textsubscript{2}MM.

XRD patterns for the other as-cast alloys exhibited similar results to the Fe\textsubscript{77}Nd\textsubscript{10}MM\textsubscript{10}B\textsubscript{6} alloy, but with less intense extra peaks for the values of 2θ = 28°, 34.5° and 41°, whose intensity varies with alloy composition (Figure 3).

These results are not in agreement with those by Alves [16] who reported the existence of the 2:1 phase only for alloys with more than 50% Nd substituted by MM. Besides, for all annealed
As in the analysis by optical microscopy, the XRD patterns obtained for the annealed samples were similar to those from the as-cast samples (Figure 4) indicating that the annealing did not effect the phase constitution of the alloys. The displacements observed between the diffraction peaks of the samples and the indexed diffraction angles from JCPDS can be explained by recalling that the elements present in Mischmetal, especially Ce and La, are soluble in the phases in the alloys.

The TMA revealed that the $T_C$ of the 14:2:1 compound is around 285ºC for both the as-cast and annealed alloys with MM (Table 1).

Table 1: Curie temperatures for the Fe$_{14}$MM$_2$B phase in the various alloys.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alloy</th>
<th>As-cast</th>
<th>Annealed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fe$<em>{74}$Nd$</em>{9}$MM$_9$B$_8$</td>
<td>288ºC</td>
<td>286ºC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe$<em>{75}$Nd$</em>{9}$MM$_9$B$_7$</td>
<td>288ºC</td>
<td>282ºC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe$<em>{74}$Nd$</em>{10}$MM$_{10}$B$_6$</td>
<td>280ºC</td>
<td>285ºC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe$<em>{77}$Nd$</em>{7.5}$MM$_{7.5}$B$_8$</td>
<td>286ºC</td>
<td>286ºC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A magnetic transition with equivalent intensity to that of the 14:2:1 compound was observed at 445ºC. This signal is associated with a compound we designate from now on as $\phi_1$ phase, which disappeared when the alloy was heated to 500ºC (Figure 5).

Figure 5: TMA curves for the Fe$_{74}$Nd$_{10}$MM$_{10}$B$_6$ annealed alloy (first heating/cooling measurement cycle).

After these initial experiments, a series of heating/cooling cycle measurements up to 450ºC were carried out. For each measurement cycle, the intensity of the TMA signal for the $\phi_1$ phase was observed to decrease while that of the 14:2:1 phase increased (Table 2). These results indicate that $\phi_1$ is a metastable phase in the microstructures of these Fe-Nd-B based alloys.

Table 2: Curie temperatures of the $\phi_1$ metastable phase for the heating/cooling measurement cycles up to 450ºC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Heating Curve</th>
<th>Cooling Curve</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>440 ºC</td>
<td>412 ºC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>412 ºC</td>
<td>400 ºC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>400 ºC</td>
<td>380 ºC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>380 ºC</td>
<td>345 ºC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 CONCLUSIONS

The microstructures of the as-cast and heat-treated Fe-Nd-MM-B alloys are similar to the microstructure of the Fe-Nd-B based alloys. However, we verified the presence of Fe$_2$MM, instead of Fe$_4$MMB$_4$, for the Fe$_{74}$Nd$_{10}$MM$_{10}$B$_6$ alloy. This result contradicts that reported by Alves [16], who only observed the presence of Fe$_2$MM in alloys with more than 50% Nd substituted by MM.
The 14:2:1 compound had a $T_C$ around 285 °C for all the samples with Mischmetal. This is a reasonable value considering the amount of MM in these alloys that preserve the phase anisotropy, as confirmed by the presence of the magnetic domains. The compound with $T_C = 445$°C appears to be a metastable phase ($\phi_1$) although the composition and structure have not yet been confirmed. We believe that this phase is a result of the quenching stresses in the matrix during the arc melting cooling stage or the rapid cooling of the sample after the long time anneals at 1000°C. The metastable nature of this phase is indicated by the fact that it appears to decompose when the samples are reheated slightly above its $T_C$; the decomposition reaction produces the Fe$_{14}$Nd$_2$B phase. *Were these last two points ever discussed in the body of the paper?*

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The authors are grateful to FAPESP (proc. 96/006433) and CNPq for the financial support.

**REFERENCES**