

**Zeitschrift:** IABSE reports = Rapports AIPC = IVBH Berichte  
**Band:** 62 (1991)  
  
**Artikel:** Shear strength of beams at very low temperatures  
**Autor:** Taerwe, Luc / Lambotte, Hendrik  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-47700>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 09.12.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## Shear Strength of Beams at Very Low Temperatures

Résistance à l'effort tranchant de poutres à très basses températures

Schubtragfähigkeit von Stahlbetonbalken im Tieftemperaturbereich

### Luc TAERWE

Lecturer  
Univ. of Ghent  
Ghent, Belgium



Luc Taerwe graduated as Civil Engineer at the University of Ghent in 1975 where he also obtained his Doctor's degree. At the Magnel Laboratory he is involved in research on nonlinear behaviour of concrete structures, high strength concrete, quality assurance and stochastic modelling. He is the recipient of several scientific awards.

### Hendrik LAMBOTTE

Prof. Emeritus  
Univ. of Ghent  
Ghent, Belgium



Hendrik Lambotte was Director of the Magnel Laboratory for Reinforced Concrete from 1983 to 1990 and Full Professor involved in teaching and research on reinforced and prestressed concrete. He is chairman of the Belgian Standardization Committee on Concrete, member of the Advisory Committee of CEB and of the Editorial Group of EC 2.

### SUMMARY

Loading tests on 14 reinforced concrete beams were performed both at ambient temperature and at  $-165^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Most beams failed in shear. From the results, it follows that under cryogenic conditions shear strength increases considerably. This effect is mainly due to the increase of concrete tensile strength at low temperatures. Also restrained thermal shortening of the reinforcing steel has a beneficial effect.

### RÉSUMÉ

Une série de 14 poutres en béton armé a été soumise à un essai de mise en charge et ceci à températures ambiantes et à  $-165^{\circ}\text{C}$ . La plupart des poutres présentent une rupture à l'effort tranchant. Les résultats des essais montrent que la résistance à l'effort tranchant augmente considérablement en environnement cryogénique. Ce phénomène peut être attribué principalement à l'augmentation de la résistance à la traction du béton à basses températures. La contraction thermique empêchée de l'acier a également un effet favorable.

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

An einer Reihe von insgesamt 14 Stahlbetonbalken wurden Schubversuche durchgeführt, sowohl bei Umgebungstemperatur als auch bei  $-165^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Die meisten Balken erwiesen einen Schubbruch. Aus den Versuchsergebnissen folgt, dass die Schubtragfähigkeit erheblich zunimmt im Tieftemperaturbereich, was hauptsächlich am günstigen Einfluss der niedrigen Temperaturen auf die Betonzugfestigkeit zugeschrieben werden kann. Auch die verhinderte thermische Dehnung des Betonstahls hat einen günstigen Einfluss.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge of the structural behaviour of concrete members at very low temperatures is particularly important for the design of storage tanks for liquefied natural gas (LNG). In the case of LNG tanks with elevated base slab (e.g. at Zeebrugge, Belgium) the area around the supporting columns has to be checked for punching shear not only under regular but also under accidental loading conditions involving cooling of the slab from above due to spill from the inner steel container. Also the wall to base connection is an area subjected to important shear forces. Hence the need to investigate the influence of very low temperatures on shear resistance of reinforced concrete beams and slabs. In this paper, the results of loading tests on beams are discussed by addressing the influence of low temperatures on material properties and by considering the action effects caused by internal restraints. As pointed out by Breen [1], particular types of loading and restraints are among the technical challenges that remain to be explored. Moreover, shear strength is one of the typical fields where reliance on concrete tensile strength is taken into account, as indicated by Hillerborg in [2].

## 2. TEST PROGRAM

Loading tests were performed on 14 reinforced concrete beams with a span of 1.5 m, a width  $b = 400$  mm and a total depth  $h = 200$  mm (fig. 1). The effective depth  $d$  equals 165 mm and the tensile reinforcement of the beams consists of deformed TEMPCORE bars  $\emptyset 14$  mm. The beam designation (table 1) consists of the capitals P (preliminary), R (reference) and L (low temperature) followed by the longitudinal reinforcement ratio  $\rho_s = A_s/bd$  in % and the web reinforcement ratio  $\rho_{sw} = A_{sw}/bs$  also in % (s denoting stirrup spacing). The stirrups consist of 4 legged closed stirrups, 6 or 8 mm in diameter. By way of example, the dimensions and the reinforcement of beams R/1.86/0.20 and L/1.86/0.20 are shown in fig. 1.

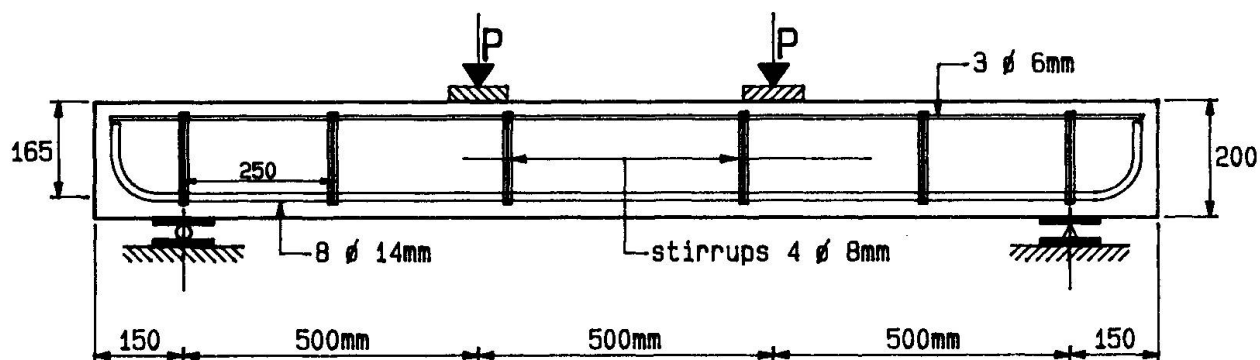
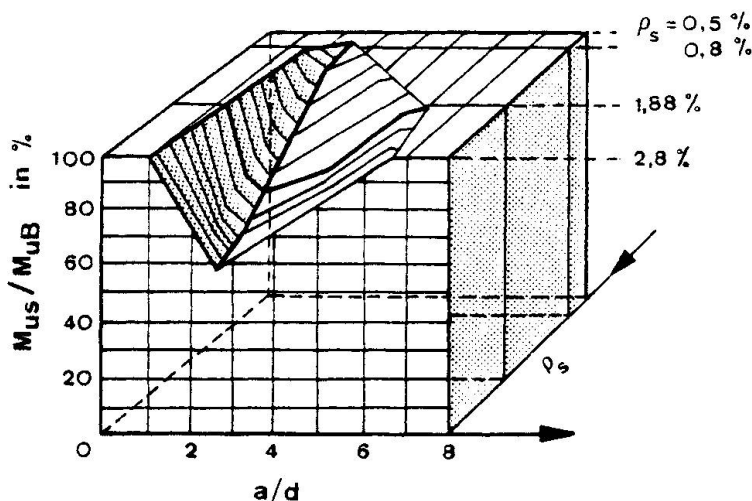


Fig. 1 Dimensions and reinforcement of beams R/1.86/0.20 and L/1.86/0.20

The beams designated P and R were tested at room temperature (20°C) at an age of respectively 28 days and 3 months. The upper face of the beams designated L, was cooled with liquid nitrogen (-196°C) until, at the level of the tensile reinforcement, a temperature of about -165°C was reached. This latter value corresponds to the temperature of liquefied natural gas. Cooling took about 6 hours. Subsequently the loads were gradually increased up to failure. Vertical copper strips, partially embedded in the beams' upper surface, served to retain the liquid nitrogen. Insulating pannels were glued at the side faces, in order to obtain a uniform temperature distribution over the width of the beams.

Beam designation	$\rho_s$ (%)	$\rho_{sw}$ (%)	s (mm)	$P_u$ (kN)	$\tau_u$ (N/mm <sup>2</sup> )	Type of failure
P/0.93/0.00	0.93	0	-	105	1.59	shear
P/1.86/0.00	1.86	0	-	122	1.85	shear
R/0.93/0.00	0.93	0	-	107	1.62	bending
R/0.93/0.19	0.93	0.19	150	108	1.64	bending
R/1.40/0.00	1.40	0	-	120	1.82	shear
R/1.86/0.00	1.86	0	-	136	2.06	shear
R/1.86/0.20	1.86	0.20	250	201	3.05	shear
R/1.86/0.34	1.86	0.34	150	195	2.95	bending
L/0.93/0.00	0.93	0	-	150	2.27	shear
L/0.93/0.19	0.93	0.19	150	189	2.86	bending
L/1.40/0.00	1.40	0	-	194	2.94	shear
L/1.86/0.00	1.86	0	-	278	4.21	shear
L/1.86/0.20	1.86	0.20	250	315	4.77	shear
L/1.86/0.34	1.86	0.34	150	275	4.17	shear

Table 1 Survey of beam characteristics



The beams were submitted to two point loads at a third of the span. Hence the shear span "a" equals 500 mm and  $a/d = 3$ . This latter value is known to be the most critical for shear strength [3]. In fig. 2 Kani's "shear failure valley" for beams without shear reinforcement is shown [3]. The diagram depicts the influence of  $a/d$  and  $\rho_s$  on the ratio of the ultimate moment corresponding to shear failure ( $M_{us}$ ) to the ultimate moment for bending failure ( $M_{ub}$ ).

Fig. 2 Kani's shear failure valley [3]

Stirrup spacing  $s = 150$  mm corresponds to  $z/s = 1$ , where  $z = 0.9 d$  equals the depth in the equivalent truss model. In the case of  $s = 250$  mm, the ratio  $z/s$  equals  $150/250 = 3/5$  which is the lower value of the crack inclination  $\theta$  allowed in the "accurate" shear design method according to the CEB-FIP Model Code for Concrete Structures (1978 Edition).

### 3. MATERIAL PROPERTIES

The beams and the accompanying test specimens were cured in a moist room at 20°C until 24 hr before testing. Mean concrete strength characteristics are given in table 2. Due to the low temperature effect, compressive strength  $f_{c,cub}$  increased by a factor 1.78 and flexural tensile strength  $f_{ctb}$  by a factor 1.49.



Beam type	28 days	3 months					
	$f_{c,cub}$	$f_{c,cub}$		$f_c$	$f_{ct}$	$f_{ctb}$	
	20°C	20°C	-165°C	20°C	20°C	20°C	-165°C
P	63.4	70.7	-	-	-	-	-
R	62.2	70.8	-	62.8	3.53	8.53	-
L	-	72.0	128.0	61.9	4.50	8.75	13.08

**Table 2** Concrete strength characteristics in N/mm<sup>2</sup>

For the longitudinal tensile reinforcement  $f_y = 504$  N/mm<sup>2</sup> and  $f_{st} = 588$  N/mm<sup>2</sup> were obtained as mean values at 20°C. For the type of reinforcing steel used it was found in previous research programs that the yield stress at -165°C increased by about 50 % compared to the value at 20°C [4]. However, calculated ultimate moments for the beams considered indicate that in this case the increase might be about 70 %. The ratio  $f_{st}/f_y$  approaches 1 under cryogenic conditions.

#### 4. TEST RESULTS

The ultimate loads  $P_u$  and the type of failure are mentioned in table 1. Shear failures occurred due to flexure shear cracking in the shear spans. For all beams, included those failing in bending, the nominal shear stress  $\tau_u = V_u/bd$  is indicated in table 1.

#### 5. DISCUSSION OF TEST RESULTS

##### 5.1. General analysis

Comparison of the  $\tau_u$ -values for similar beams failing in shear both at 20°C and -165°C, yields ratios varying between 1.43 and 2.04. This increase in shear resistance must mainly be attributed to the increase in tensile strength of the concrete due to the low temperatures (see also section 5.2).

The observation that for two identical beams, P/0.93/0.00 and R/0.93/0.00, the first fails in shear and the latter in bending can be explained by the fact that the value of  $\rho_s$  corresponds to the onset of Kani's shear failure valley (fig. 2). Hence, due to the scatter inherent to this type of test, either failure mode is equally likely to occur. However, at low temperatures, the shear failure mode is clearly predominant. The presence of stirrups in beam L/0.93/0.19 is not apparent from the failure load since beam L/0.93/0.00 failed already in bending.

Beam R/1.86/0.20, failing in shear, was probably already very near to the transition from shear to bending failure as beam R/1.86/0.34 fails at a slightly lower load in bending. At low temperatures shear failure is predominant for  $\rho_s = 1.86$  %. The difference in web reinforcement ratio for the three beams L/1.86 is not reflected in the failure loads. Probably the onset of yielding of the tensile reinforcement initiated shear failure.

According to [3], the stirrups become active from a value  $\tau_{oD} = 0.24 \sqrt{f_{c,cub}}$  on. For beam R/1.86/0.20 this corresponds to a shear force  $0.24 \sqrt{70.9} \times 0.9 \times 165 \times 400 = 120$  kN. This value is in very good agreement with the experimental

strain measurements. These also indicate yielding of the stirrups at ultimate and hence the corresponding force equals  $F_{sw} = f_y \times A_{sw} = 472 \times 201 = 95 \text{ kN}$ . Summation of both contributions yields 215 kN as estimate of the experimental value of 201 kN.

### 5.2. Influence of tensile strength on shear resistance

The influence of tensile strength on shear resistance is accounted for by a factor  $\sqrt{f_c}$  in the formulas for the ultimate nominal shear stress. According to [3] the nominal shear stress for beams without stirrups is given by

$$\tau_{u,1} = 0.18 \sqrt{f_{c,cub}} \sqrt[3]{100 \rho_s} \quad (1)$$

for the particular values of the scale factor and  $a/d$  applicable to the beams considered. In [5], the following modification of the ACI 318 Building Code formula (11-6) was proposed

$$\tau_{u,2} = 0.15 \sqrt{f_c} + 62.6 \rho_s \frac{d}{a} \quad (2)$$

The calculated values are mentioned in table 3 and compared with the experimental values  $\tau_u$ . For the cooled beams, the material properties at  $-165^\circ\text{C}$  have been considered. Formulas (1) and (2) underestimate the experimental values by about 10 % and 25 % respectively, at least for the beams tested at  $20^\circ\text{C}$  and beam L/0.93/0.00. A better fit can be obtained for (1) by increasing the first factor up to 0.20 and for (2) by doubling the second term.

Beam	$\tau_u$ (N/mm <sup>2</sup> )	$\tau_{u,1}$ (N/mm <sup>2</sup> )	$\frac{\tau_u}{\tau_{u,1}}$	$\tau_{u,2}$ (N/mm <sup>2</sup> )	$\frac{\tau_u}{\tau_{u,2}}$
P/0.93/0.00	1.59	1.41	1.13	1.33	1.20
P/1.86/0.00	1.85	1.75	1.06	1.51	1.23
R/1.40/0.00	1.82	1.67	1.09	1.49	1.22
R/1.86/0.00	2.06	1.79	1.15	1.56	1.32
L/0.93/0.00	2.27	1.99	1.14	1.78	1.27
L/1.40/0.00	2.94	2.28	1.29	1.88	1.56
L/1.86/0.00	4.21	2.55	1.65	1.97	2.14

Table 3 Experimental and calculated nominal shear stresses.

From table 3 it follows that for the lower temperatures and the higher  $\rho_s$  values the underestimation becomes very important which indicates that phenomena other than those accounted for by (1) and (2) must have a beneficial contribution to shear resistance.

### 5.3. Other phenomena affecting shear resistance at low temperatures

Under cryogenic conditions, the coefficient of thermal expansion of steel is only slightly reduced whereas that of concrete significantly decreases, depending on the moisture content. As pointed out in [4], the restrained differential shortening in a reinforced concrete section causes a kind of artificial prestressing. Considering a symmetrical section subjected to a uniform temperature drop  $\Delta T$ , the compressive stress in the concrete can be calculated by the following formula



$$\sigma_c = \frac{E_s \cdot \rho \cdot (\alpha_{ts} - \alpha_{tc}) \cdot \Delta T}{1 + (\alpha - 1) \rho} \quad (3)$$

where  $\alpha_{ts}$  and  $\alpha_{tc}$  are the coefficients of thermal expansion of steel and concrete and  $\rho$  is calculated as  $(A_s + A_{sc})/bh$ . In the case of a non-symmetric reinforcement arrangement, this formula still holds for the stress at the centroid of the equivalent section  $A_c + \alpha A_s$ . Introducing  $\Delta T = 190^\circ\text{C}$ ,  $E_c = 35000 \text{ N/mm}^2$ ,  $\alpha_{ts} - \alpha_{tc} = 3.10 \cdot 10^{-6}/^\circ\text{C}$  and the appropriate values of  $\rho$ , one finds  $\sigma_c = 0.96 \text{ N/mm}^2$  ( $\rho_s = 0.93 \%$ ),  $\sigma_c = 1.36 \text{ N/mm}^2$  ( $\rho_s = 1.40 \%$ ) and  $\sigma_c = 1.74 \text{ N/mm}^2$  ( $\rho_s = 1.86 \%$ ). The induced compressive stress  $\sigma_c$  has a beneficial influence on the principal tensile stress  $\sigma_I = \sqrt{\sigma_c^2/4 + \tau_c^2} - \sigma_c/2$ .

This effect is merely related to the first contributing term in (2) and does not fully account for the observed higher  $\tau_u$  values at low temperatures and highest  $\rho_s$  values. The second term in (2), which reflects the influence of  $A_s$ , must also increase because of higher bond strength, and smaller crack widths and deflections at the same load level. These phenomena, confirmed by experimental observations, hamper propagation and opening of the inclined cracks.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

From loading tests on reinforced concrete beams both at reference temperature ( $+20^\circ\text{C}$ ) and under cryogenic conditions ( $-165^\circ\text{C}$ ), it can be concluded that the beneficial effect of very low temperatures on shear strength has to be attributed to the following phenomena (in descending order of importance)

- increased tensile strength of concrete
- restrained thermal shortening of the steel, creating a kind of prestressing
- higher bond strength and smaller crack widths, causing a higher contribution of the shear strength term proportional to  $\rho_s$ .

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors gratefully acknowledge research grant no. 2.9002.85 from the Belgian Fund for Joint Basic Research.

## REFERENCES

1. BREEN J., Why structural concrete. Introductory Report, IABSE Colloquium "Structural Concrete", 1991, Stuttgart.
2. HILLERBORG A., Reliance upon concrete tensile strength. Introductory Report for Theme 2.5, IABSE Colloquium "Structural Concrete", 1991, Stuttgart.
3. LEONHARDT F., Schub bei Stahlbeton und Spannbeton - Grundlagen der neueren Schubbemessung. Beton- und Stahlbetonbau 11/1977, pp. 270-277, 12/1977, pp. 295-302.
4. LAMBOTTE H., TAERWE L., DE SAINT MOULIN I., Shear resistance at low temperatures of deep hyperstatic reinforced concrete beams. Proceedings "Symposium on Transport and Storage of LPG & LNG", Brugge, 1984, Royal Flemish Society of Civil Engineers (K.VIV), pp. 357-364.
5. SMITH K., VANTSIOTIS A., Deep Beam Test Results Compared with Present Building Code Models. ACI Journal, July-August, 1982, pp. 280-287.