SP-87-1

75-Story Texas Commerce Plaza, Houston – the Use of High-Strength Concrete

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By Joseph P. Colaco

<u>Synopsis:</u> The article describes the use of high-strength concrete in the 75-story composite frame for the Texas Commerce Plaza in Houston. The advantages of the high-strength concrete were to reduce column sizes and to increase stiffness. All the concrete in this tower (approximately 100,000 cyd.) was successfully pumped, the highest placement being almost a 1,000' above the street level.

<u>Keywords</u>: columns (supports); <u>concrete construction</u>; <u>high-rise</u> <u>buildings</u>; <u>high-strength concretes</u>; pumped concrete; stiffness.

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Joseph P. Colaco received his PhD in Civil Engineering at the University of Illinois in 1965 and joined Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Chicago office that same year. In 1969, Mr. Colaco joined Ellisor Engineers, Inc., Houston, Texas; in 1975, he and two partners opened their firm of consulting structural engineers, CBM Engineers (previously named Colaco Engineers, Inc.) in Houston, Texas.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Texas Commerce Plaza Tower in United Energy Plaza is a 75-story office building in downtown Houston. The design was started in 1978 and the structure was completed in 1981. The structure is the tallest <u>composite</u> building in the world and the tallest building west of the Mississippi at the present time.

A photograph of the building is shown in Figure 1. Figure 2 shows the general architectural layout of a typical floor plan and the essential elements of the structural system. The exterior structure of the building has columns placed at 10' (3m.) on centers on four sides but on the fifth side, there is an 85' (26m.) clear span. The exterior columns are composite using a steel erection column and cast-in-place concrete. There is also a cast-in-place concrete 5' (1.5m.) deep spandrel beam at each level (see Figure 3). The interior columns and floor framing use structural steel. The foundation of the tower is a 9'-9" (3m.) thick concrete mat, 63' (19.2m.) below grade. A more detailed description of the building is given in an article by Pickard (1). The exterior composite system, called a "ruptured-tube," is the main element that is used to carry the wind loads on the structure. Since the closely spaced tube is ruptured at the 85' (26m.) clear span front face, the healing of the rupture was required. Several alternates were considered viz. providing diagonals across the front face to complete the "tube" or providing stiff truss elements at discrete floors to tie the ends of the front face together. These alternates were discarded for aesthetic reasons. Hence, the only option was to use the building core. A concrete shear wall is placed next to the front row of elevators and the connection between the interior shear wall and the exterior tube is by very stiff steel link beams in the plane of the floor. There is a secondary stiffness element consisting of a steel girder that spans 85' (26m.) and ties the two triangular concrete front piers of the building. There is a dramatic difference in behavior of the structure. If the rupture were not "healed", the vertical movement from one end of the front face to the other would be approximately 6" at the top of the building.

At the time of the design of Texas Commerce Tower, the state-ofthe-art in tall building design in Houston was exemplified by the 50-story concrete One Shell Plaza building and the 55-story InterFirst Tower which is a composite "tube" building. At the

start of the Texas Commerce Tower, discussions were held with the Owner on the materials and technology to be used for construction of the building. Due to the poor foundation conditions in Houston, an all-concrete building was ruled out because of its additional weight. The weight would require extremely deep and expensive foundations and would increase the construction time. It was felt, therefore, that the only reasonable choices were the composite building design or an all-steel structure. The architectural features of the building dictated a granite facade which tends to favor the composite building design. Further, experience with the 55-story InterFirst Tower indicated that a composite building could be built fast and economically and minimize foundation premiums. Therefore, it was decided that the building would utilize a composite "tube" system.

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At the time of the design of Texas Commerce Tower, the maximum concrete strength utilized in building construction in Houston was 6,000 psi (42MPa) lightweight concrete for One Shell Plaza but most of the building utilized normal weight concrete with 5,000 psi (35MPa) as a maximum strength. This is due to the problems of obtaining higher strengths with river gravel that is a common aggregate in Houston. A 75-story structure utilizing low-strength concrete would result in extremely large columns. The Owners indicated that they would have a maximum exterior column size of 4'x4' at the third floor from a leasing standpoint. Hence, research was conducted on using high-strength concrete to reduce column size. If 5,000 psi were used, the exterior column sizes needed would be 4'x6' which was unacceptable. Discussions with Southwestern Laboratories in Houston indicated that highstrength concrete was being used in limited applications in highway work in Texas. Investigation indicated that if the aggregate were changed from river gravel to a limestone aggregate (which had to be imported into Houston), higher strengths could be achieved. A trial mix was conducted using 7,500 psi (52MPa) as a target design strength. A batch of this concrete was placed on a 24-story tall concrete building in the heat of the summer months to try to simulate a worst case condition. The results were very gratifying. Further discussions with Turner Construction (the Contractor on Texas Commerce Tower) suggested the use of highstrength concrete as a way to minimize costs and column sizes. This analysis confirmed published literature that economical construction is obtained by using high concrete strengths and the lowest reinforcement percentages. Turner retained The Concrete Associates of Dallas as consultants to review mix designs to come up with recommendations for the high-strength concrete. After extensive evaluation and testing, it was concluded that 7,500 psi (52MPa) concrete could be produced in Houston in sufficient quantities and with sufficient quality control to proceed with the design of the project.

4

II. HIGH-STRENGTH CONCRETE

The outcome of the design was that 7,500 (52MPa) normal weight concrete was utilized in exterior columns, spandrel beams and shear wall from the mat foundation upto the 7th floor, and 6,000 psi (42MPa) was utilized for these elements from the 8th to the 30th floors. The mat foundation itself utilized 6,000 psi (42MPa) concrete. An extensive discussion of the mix designs, quality control and results of the entire programmare described by Cook(2). Due consideration was taken of the Contractor's requirement that the concrete be pumped and also, of hot weather conditions in Houston. Texas Commerce Tower is unique in that all the concrete on the project was pumped with the highest concrete placement being about 1,000' (304m.) above street level. The concrete pump used was a Schwing BPA HDD-15 5000 trailer-mounted, 300 horsepower, 6" material cylinders, capable of 2,800 psi on concrete. The actual pressure ranged from 1,700 - 2,400 psi. No problems were encountered with the pumping operation. The mix designs indicated that 630 lb./cyd. (374 kg/m³) cement with 157 lb./cyd. (93 kg/m³) fly ash Type C was adequate for the 7,500 psi (52MPa) high-strength concrete in the project. The slump was 4.5 inches (10cm) and the water/cement ratio was 0.33. An ASTM C494 Type A water-reducing admixture was used with a dosage rate of 3 oz./100 lb. of cementitious material. The 7,500 psi (52MPa) concrete was placed during the period from November, 1979 to May, 1980 and the average 28-day concrete strengths were 8,146 psi (56MPa) while the 56-day strengths were 9,005 psi (62MPa). A similar set of numbers was achieved for the 6,000 psi (42MPa) nominal strength concrete. The 28-day averages were 7,257 psi (50MPa) while the 56-day average was 8,340 psi (58MPa). A degree of conservatism was exercised in the Specifications for this project as this was the first time that high-strength concrete was being used in Houston. In later work, 56-day strengths as opposed to 28-day strengths were considered to be the norm.

III. ADVANTAGES OF HIGH-STRENGTH CONCRETE

There are several advantages of high-strength concrete and they can be summarized as follows:

A. <u>Additional Stiffness:</u> One of the considerations in tall buildings is the restriction of inter-story drift under lateral loads. This is required in order to keep architectural elements from having any distress. Almost all tall building designs are controlled by stiffness requirements and hence, the use of highstrength concrete with its high modulus of elasticity results in a lower inter-story drift for the same member sizes. On this project, nominal 7,500 (52MPa) concrete had a modulus of elasticity of approximately 5.7x106 psi (39,330MPa) which is substantially higher than that which is obtainable with 5,000 psi (35MPa) concrete. The net result of this high E value is that the maximum deflection of the building under hurricane wind loads will not exceed 16" (41cm.) at the top of the building for wind in any direction.

B. <u>Damping</u>: Extensive discussions were held with the University of Western Ontario that conducted the wind tunnel analysis for the project. A detailed description of the structural elements of the design is discussed by Banavalkar (3). Since the basic wind resisting elements are concrete members, the damping ratio was 2% whereas for an all-steel building, a 1% damping factor is generally used. This resulted in a much lower peak acceleration in the wind tunnel test. The building accelerations at the top floor of the building were in the range of 18 milli-gs for a 10-year recurrence interval which is below the generally accepted criteria for the threshold of discomfort due to building motion.

6

C. Axial Shortening: The differential movements of vertical elements in tall buildings are a critical item in the constructability of level floors. In a composite frame, the problem is exacerbated by the fact that the interior columns of structural steel have only elastic axial shortening while the exterior composite columns are subjected not only to axial shortening due to stress but to shrinkage and creep. The use of high-strength con-crete which has a higher modulus of elasticity reduces the axial shortening of the concrete columns. The use of limestone aggregate and the use of fly ash (which lowers cement content) reduce the shrinkage of the concrete columns. Axial shortening compensation tables were developed for the entire structure and interior steel column lengths were adjusted at 10-story increments to try to attain level floors. A detailed description of this is given in the paper by Banavalkar (3). In the worst case, at the roof level the columns at the end of the 85' clear span were placed 2.5 inches (6.3cm.) higher than the columns in the middle of the long faces.

D. Construction Techniques: One of the key ingredients of tall building economics is the ability to build the building as rapidly as possible. The General Contractor suggested two techniques both of which accelerated the construction schedule. These techniques were pumping of the concrete in the exterior frame and the use of a custom-made three-story steel formwork assembly that was self-climbing. Each side of the form assembly not only included the column and spandrel forms but also had lifting column system which enabled the formwork to climb. The column forms and spandrel forms were all hinged. One of the advantages of highstrength concrete in this configuration is that the columns and spandrel beams could be stripped early-on due to the low stress level and the relatively high concrete strengths. The average concrete strengths were 3,827 psi (26MPa) at 1-day and 5,218 psi (36MPa) at 3-days for the 7,500 psi (52MPa) concrete. The construction proceeded at the rate of two floors per week which at least equals that for structural steel construction.

IV. CONCLUSION

The use of high-strength concrete on Texas Commerce Tower has proved to be extremely successful in meeting the Owner's objectives, namely: reducing the column sizes (to increase the

leasability of the floors); the development of rapid construction techniques; and, the satisfactory performance of the building from a stiffness and motion perception standpoint.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

A project of the magnitude of Texas Commerce Tower involves the hard work of all the team members (Owners, Architect, General Contractor, Concrete Consultant, Concrete Suppliers, etc.). The writer wishes to acknowledge all of them and the CBM Engineers' design team headed by Dr. P. V. Banavalkar and Mr. Tony Abyad.

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Fig. 1--Texas Commerce Tower in United Energy Plaza, Houston



Fig. 2--Typical floor plan



PLAN OF EXTERIOR COLUMN



Fig. 3--Column, spandrel, and floor beam details

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SP-87-2

Impact of High-Strength Concrete on Design and Service Behavior of Prestressed Precast Concrete Members

By Alex Aswad and Weston T. Hester

<u>Synopsis</u>: In the prestressed, precast concrete industry highstrength concretes are widely used for axially loaded piles and columns, but also increasingly for flexural members such as double tee beams and girders. Use of high-strength concretes permits fabrication of longer, more slender spans and economic mild and prestressed reinforcing steel patterns. And, for plant-produced members the necessary high strength may be achieved easily and consistently without out-of-the-ordinary quality control procedures, and this is documented here. To facilitate designs using high-strength concretes a number of design aids have been developed, and selected examples are persented. Finally, by its very nature, where high early strengths are required prestressed precast concrete members frequently have a substantial amount of long-term reserve capacity and excellent deflection control.

<u>Keywords</u>: beams (supports); girders; <u>high-strength concretes</u>; precast concrete; prestressed concrete; serviceability; structural <u>design</u>; T-beams.

10 Aswad and Hester

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#### INTRODUCTION

Manufacturers of prestressed, precast concrete products are increasingly using high-strength concretes for flexural and axially loaded members. Use of high-strength concrete permits more slender, higher-capacity and ultimately more economic structural sections. In many cases, use of high-strength concretes is a necessity and not an option if prestressed, precast sections are to be economically feasible for the project, and especially in the case of long span members and/or those carrying unusually heavy loadings. High early and long-term strength concretes are being used in double tees for roofs and floors, inverted tees for buildings, and I-, box- and double-tee-shaped (TT) elements for bridges.

Designers have traditionally defined high-strength concrete as that achieving at least 6,000 psi (42 MPa) at age 28 days or later [1]. But, whereas with traditional cast-in-place (CIP) construction the designer may require 6,000 to 12,000 psi (42 to 96 MPa) compressive strengths at age 28 days, or even 56 to 90 days, prestressed concrete producers may need these strengths much sooner. Producers are primarily interested in strengths at early ages (i.e., 12 to 18 hours), rather than long-term (i.e., at least 28 days), and these producers classify as "high-strength" concretes with early strengths of at least 4,000 psi (28 MPa) at age 12 to 18 hours, and 28-day strengths in excess of about 6,000 psi (42 MPa).

For both prestressed precast and CIP concrete construction, designers and contractors have used high-strength concretes (measured at age 28 days or later) to meet a variety of special needs, including:

- 1. Ability to use more slender, lighter sections;
- 2. Longer spans and/or wider member spacings;
- 3. Greater stiffness and better control of deformations;
- Reductions in prestressing losses due to a better control over creep and shrinkage;