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NEUTRON YIELDS FROM THICK TARGETS BOMBARDED BY 24-Mev DEUTERONS AND 12-Mev PROTONS

W. E. Crandall, G. P. Millburn and L. Schecter

November 30, 1955

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NEUTRON YIELDS FROM THICK TARGETS BOMBARDED BY 24-Mev DEUTERONS AND 12-Mev PROTONS

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Berkeley, California

November 30, 1955

ABSTRACT

The gross yields of neutrons produced by 24-Mev deuterons bombarding Be, Cu, Ta, and U and by 12-Mev protons bombarding Be, Cu, and Ta were measured by detecting the neutrons in a solution of $MnSO_4$ that surrounded the targets. The yields were (in neutrons per μcoul): 24-Mev deuterons: Be, 1.85×10^{11}; Cu, 0.55×10^{11}; Ta, 0.52×10^{11}; U, 0.73×10^{11}; 12-Mev protons: Be, 4.1×10^{10}; Cu, $\overset{0.61}{\cancel{6.1}} \times 10^{9}$; Ta, $\overset{0.15}{\cancel{1.5}} \times 10^{9}$.

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NEUTRON YIELDS FROM THICK TARGETS BOMBARDED BY 24-Mev DEUTERONS AND 12-Mev PROTONS

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I. INTRODUCTION

The gross yield of neutrons from thick targets bombarded by 24-Mev deuterons and 12-Mev protons has been measured for a few elements. The neutrons that escaped from the target were detected by counting the Mn^{56} activity in a solution of $MnSO_4$ that surrounded a cavity that contained the targets. The incident beam was monitored by placing the targets in a faraday cup.

Gross yields for 10-Mev deuterons and 30-Mev alphas have been measured by Smith and Kruger[1] using this method, and the fast neutron yields for 15-Mev deuterons have been measured by Allen et al.[2] by a different method. Recently Cohen[3] has used threshold detectors to obtain yields for 23-Mev protons and Tai[4] has used the $MnSO_4$ tank detection method to measure yields for 32-Mev protons from the linear accelerator at this laboratory. No other measurements of gross yields from thick targets have been found in the literature for energies greater than 1 Mev.

The source of the charged particles was the 60-inch cyclotron of the Crocker Laboratory of the University of California. Beam currents of the order of microamperes were used in a strong-focused external beam.[5]

II. EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

A. Beam Extraction and Characteristics

The general problem of extracting the beam from the 60-inch cyclotron and the strong-focusing system has been described by Ellis.[5] The same method was used for our experiment, but in order that the $MnSO_4$ tank could be in a region of low neutron background, a steering magnet was placed just outside the cyclotron shielding tanks (see Fig. 1) and the beam deflected approximately 15°. The entire system was connected to the cyclotron tank in order to maintain a vacuum.

The beam position and shape at the target position were observed by permitting the beam to pass through a 0.001-inch stainless steel foil and strike a fluorescent screen. The steering and focusing magnet currents were adjusted, and the faraday cup positioned, so that the beam was contained in a small spot in the center of the target position. The current hitting the brass tube leading from the steering magnet to the faraday cup could be measured; the steering magnet current was varied to cause the beam to hit first one, then the other side, and the magnet current was finally adjusted so that the beam would not wander onto the brass pipe. No data were taken until the beam was accurately positioned and no current could be detected on the brass pipe (a current of less than 0.01 μamp could have been detected). Some of these precautions were not necessary for the proton bombardment (see Sec. F). The steering magnet current was regulated to within 0.1%.

Typical currents on the target were 0.1 to 1.0 μamp for deuterons and 0.7 μamp for protons. A maximum beam of a few microamperes was available at the target. The beam at the target was contained within a circle of 1-in. diameter and the targets were 4 in. in diameter, except for the proton bombardments (see Sec. F).

B. Beam Monitoring

The targets were placed in a faraday cup formed by a brass cylinder 6 in. long and 4 in. in diameter (see Fig. 2). A 1-in. section holding the targets could be insulated from the remainder of the cylinder and the currents on each section measured separately. The negative current (from secondary electrons produced in the target and stopping in the isolated section of the cylinder) amounted to approximately 10% of the recorded positive current from the target and was roughly independent of the target material.

The total net charge collected by the faraday cup (target and cylinder) in a bombardment was placed on a low-leakage condenser connected to the inputs of a 100% inverse-feedback integrating electrometer. The electrometer signal was measured and recorded on a Leeds and Northrup Speedomax that was automatically calibrated against a standard cell before each bombardment. The condensers were compared with a condenser calibrated by the National Bureau of Standards to within 0.1%, and the electrometer scale factors were calibrated to within 1%. Thus the charge could be measured to within 1%, but because of possible leakage of the secondary electrons, we have assigned a standard error of 3% to the measurement of the number of particles striking the target.

C. Neutron Detection

The targets were placed near the center of a large aluminum tank (5 by 4 by 4 ft) that had a 1-by-1-by-5-ft tunnel passing through the center. The rear of the tunnel was filled with a removable plug approximately 14 in. deep and solution was pumped continuously between the plug and the tank. A layer of $MnSO_4$ solution at least 18 in. thick surrounded the tunnel. Neutrons that escaped from the target were moderated by the water and some of them were finally captured by Mn^{55} to form radioactive Mn^{56}. When the Mn^{56} activity was to be measured the solution was stirred manually with a pair of large paddles suspended in the tank and a small sample was drained off. An accurately measured volume of the sample was placed in a container and five Geiger counters were immersed in the sample to count the Mn^{56} activity. The mixing and sampling techniques were tested and found to give results consistent to within 1%. The above technique permitted the bombardments to proceed without the delay that would have resulted from immersing counters directly in the tank.

The detection efficiency of the solution and counters was determined by placing a 0.5-g Ra-Be source at the target position with the brass pipe, faraday cup, and target holder in position. The source was left in place for several hours and the saturation activity determined. The source was calibrated by the National Bureau of Standards to a standard error of 3%.

Several possibilities for error are inherent in this method of detecting neutrons. Probably the most important is a difference between the energy spectra of neutrons from Ra-Be and from the targets. However, 98% or more of the neutrons from the Ra-Be source are captured before they escape from the tank[6] and the majority of the neutrons emitted from the target are probably of lower energy than the mean energy of the Ra-Be neutrons.

Another cause of error would be an extreme difference between the angular distributions of neutrons from the source and from the target. This is not expected to give rise to any large error.[1]

Variations in the height of the solution in the tank would also change the specific activity because the outer layers of solution, which are in a region of very low neutron density, tend mainly to decrease the over-all specific activity. However, the height of solution is easily controlled and does not introduce any appreciable error.

D. Counting Procedure

Two sets of Geiger tubes were used to count the samples from the tank, and a solution of Co^{60} was used throughout the course of the experiment to check the reliability of the tubes. Five Tracerlab TGC-5 glass-walled tubes were connected in parallel (isolated by crystal diodes) and immersed in the solution samples. The depth of the solution in the sample holders was determined so that a variation of 1/32 in. caused less than 1% variation in the counting rate. The depth of the solution was always carefully adjusted with syringes and could be accurately reproduced to within 1/64 in.

The counters performed satisfactorily and the Co^{60} standard solution gave counting rates reproducible to within counting statistics (about 1%).

The measured counting rates were corrected for normal background, Mn^{56} activity present in the solution at the start of the bombardment, decay during and after the bombardment, and dead time of the counters. The beam current was assumed to be constant, but fluctuations would have introduced a negligible error because the longest bombardment was only about 10% of the mean life of the Mn^{56} activity.

The counting rates were always kept low enough so that the dead-time correction amounted to less than 3%. In order to do this, some samples were counted with only 1 Geiger tube and the ratio between counting rates with 1 and 5 tubes was determined (it was typically 4.9). It was also necessary at times to dilute the $MnSO_4$ sample with water; this was done by filling the sample holders with water and adding an accurately measured volume of $MnSO_4$ solution. Yields from Be were measured by all counting techniques and gave results consistent to 3%. When dilution was necessary, the sample holders and tubes were carefully rinsed with water and dried to remove the $MnSO_4$ remaining from the previous sample. The ratio between diluted and undiluted activities was typically 15.9 x 4.92 = 78.3, where 15.9 is the ratio for a diluted sample counted with 5 tubes to the undiluted sample counted with 1 tube, and 4.92 is the ratio between the counting rate for 5 tubes and 1 tube. All counting rates were normalized to that rate which would have been measured with 5 tubes.

The number of neutrons emitted during the bombardment could then be calculated. If A' is the saturation activity of the solution induced by a neutron source emitting N neutrons per minute, then $f = N/(\lambda A')$ is the number of neutrons per unit counting rate (λ is the decay constant of Mn^{56} = $1/224\ min^{-1}$).[7] Then the number of neutrons added during a bombardment

is $n = fA$ if A is the net activity at the end of bombardment (corrected for decay during bombardment).

E. Targets

The targets were 4 in. in diameter and at least 20% thicker than the range of a 25-Mev deuteron. They were made of stock material.

The targets were chosen as representative of various parts of the periodic table, and in particular to withstand the high heat load from the beam without special cooling devices.

F. Background

The background from neutrons produced elsewhere than in the target could not be directly determined for the deuteron bombardments, but various limits could be assigned. The deuteron beam was stopped in carbon at position A inside the cyclotron shielding (see Fig. 1) and found to give a negligible activity in the $MnSO_4$ tank (the activity added by 1000 μcoul of deuterons was 110 ± 70 counts per minute, or $(1.5 \pm 1.0) \times 10^7$ neutrons per μcoul). The deuteron beam was also stopped in carbon at position B outside the cyclotron shielding and gave rise to an activity corresponding to $(6 \pm 1) \times 10^8$ neutrons per μcoul. Both these background sources are negligible compared with other sources of error. A more serious background source would arise from neutrons produced in the brass pipe leading from the magnet to the faraday cup, but since the current hitting the brass pipe was always less than 1% of the current hitting the target, and since copper has a low yield, this source may also be neglected.

The energy of the protons is well below that needed for neutron production in carbon, so a background could be taken with a carbon target for the proton bombardments. This measurement gave a "yield" of $(3.1 \pm 0.3) \times 10^9$ neutrons per μcoul. This relatively high background should probably be explained. Molecular H_2^+ ions are accelerated in the cyclotron and rather than assume that no stripping occurred in the collimators or elsewhere, a 1/4-mil Al foil was introduced at position B to strip all the H_2^+ ions to atomic H^+ ions. The resultant scattering spread out the beam so that the ratio of current striking the target to that striking the brass pipe was only 3:1.

III. RESULTS

A. Yields

The yields of neutrons from 24-Mev deuterons bombarding Be, Cu, Ta, and U and from 12-Mev protons bombarding Be, Cu, and Ta are given in Table I. For comparison we have also listed the yields of 10- and 15-Mev deuterons,[1,2] and 32-Mev protons.[4]

B. Errors

The possible sources of error mentioned previously are listed here with estimates of their magnitude (standard errors):

(1) neutron source calibration	± 3%
(2) background	- 2%
(3) beam monitoring	± 3%
(4) solution sampling	± 2%
(5) counting statistics	~ 1%
(6) energy difference between target and source neutrons	± 3%
(7) variation in height of solution in tank	± 2%
(8) neutron capture by targets	< 1%

Thus an estimate of the possible systematic error to be compounded with the relative errors given in Table I is ± 6% (standard error).

IV. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was suggested and encouraged by Dr. Chester M. Van Atta, and supported in part by Dr. Burton J. Moyer. The authors wish to thank Dr. Robert E. Ellis for assistance in extracting the beam, and G. Bernard Rossi and Bart Jones of the Crocker Laboratory staff for their generous cooperation and advice. We also wish to acknowledge the cooperation of Dr. A. Carl Helmholz and Dr. Joseph G. Hamilton. Assistance at various times was given by Dr. Robert V. Pyle, Dr. John Ise, Jr., and Donald A. Hicks. The magnetic measurements group of the Radiation Laboratory under Charles G. Dols was instrumental in providing the steering magnet.

This work was done under the auspices of the U. S. Atomic Energy Commission.

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Table I

Neutron Yields from Thick Targets
(neutrons per μcoulomb)

A. Deuterons

	24 Mev x 10^{-10}	15 Mev[a] x 10^{-10}	10 Mev[b] x 10^{-10}
Be	18.5 ± 1.0	> 1.90	3.23 ± 0.24
Cu	5.5 ± 0.3	> 0.29	0.55 ± 0.05
Ta	5.2 ± 0.3	> 0.33	0.074 ± 0.014
U	7.3 ± 0.6		

B. Protons

	12 Mev x 10^{-10}	32 Mev[c] x 10^{-10}
Be	4.13 ± 0.21	12.7 ~~18.1~~ ± 0.9
Cu	0.61 ± 0.06	8.30 ~~8.48~~ ± 0.42
Ta	0.15 ± 0.04	12.6 ~~13.1~~ ± 0.7 0.6

[a] see Ref. 2

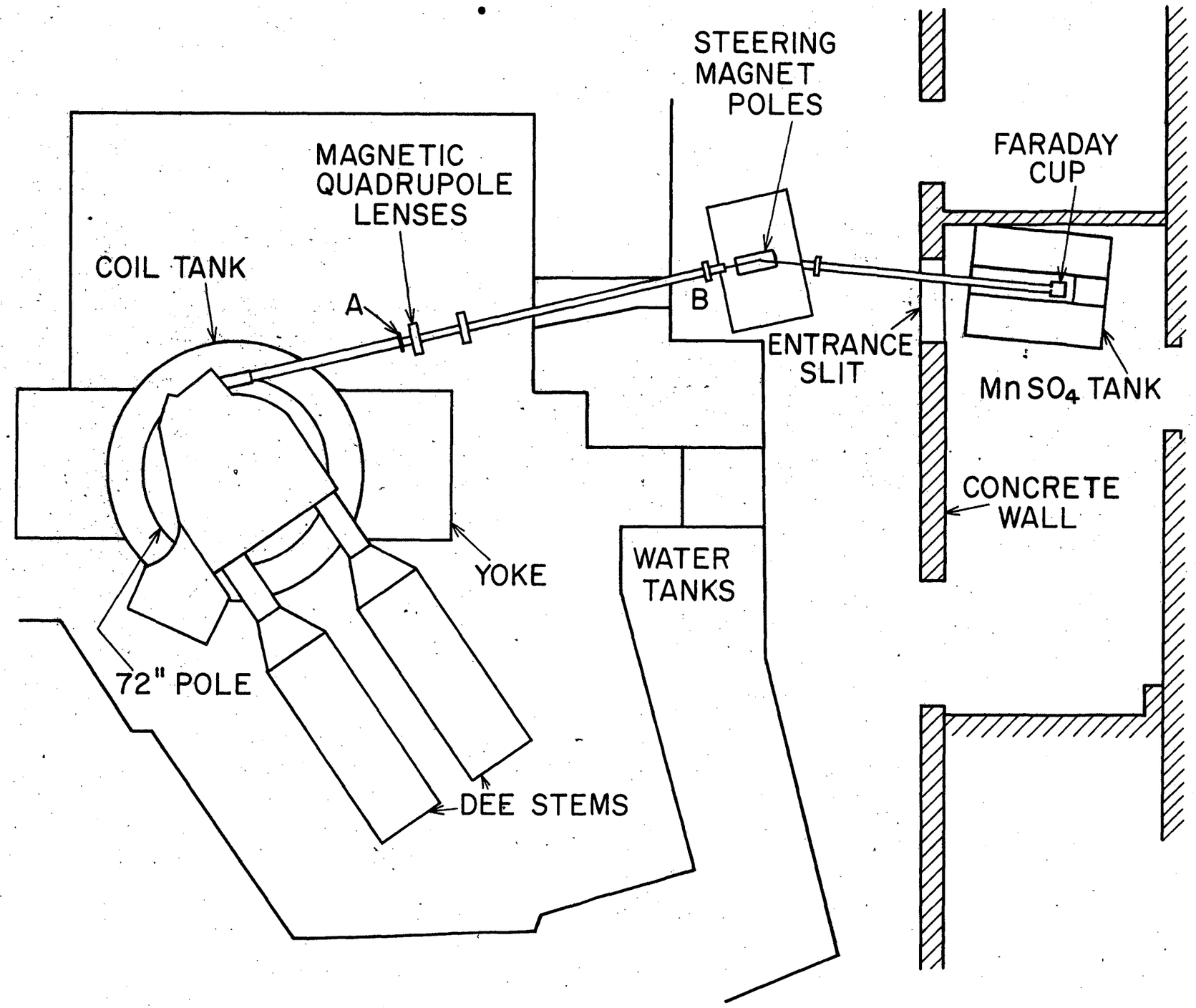
[b] see Ref. 1

[c] see Ref. 4

Figure Captions

Fig. 1. Schematic diagram of experimental arrangement.

Fig. 2. Schematic diagram of faraday cup.


STEERING
MAGNET
POLES
FARADAY
CUP
MAGNETIC
QUADRUPOLE
LENSES
COIL TANK
A
B
ENTRANCE
SLIT
$MnSO_4$ TANK
CONCRETE
WALL
YOKE
WATER
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72" POLE
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Fig-1

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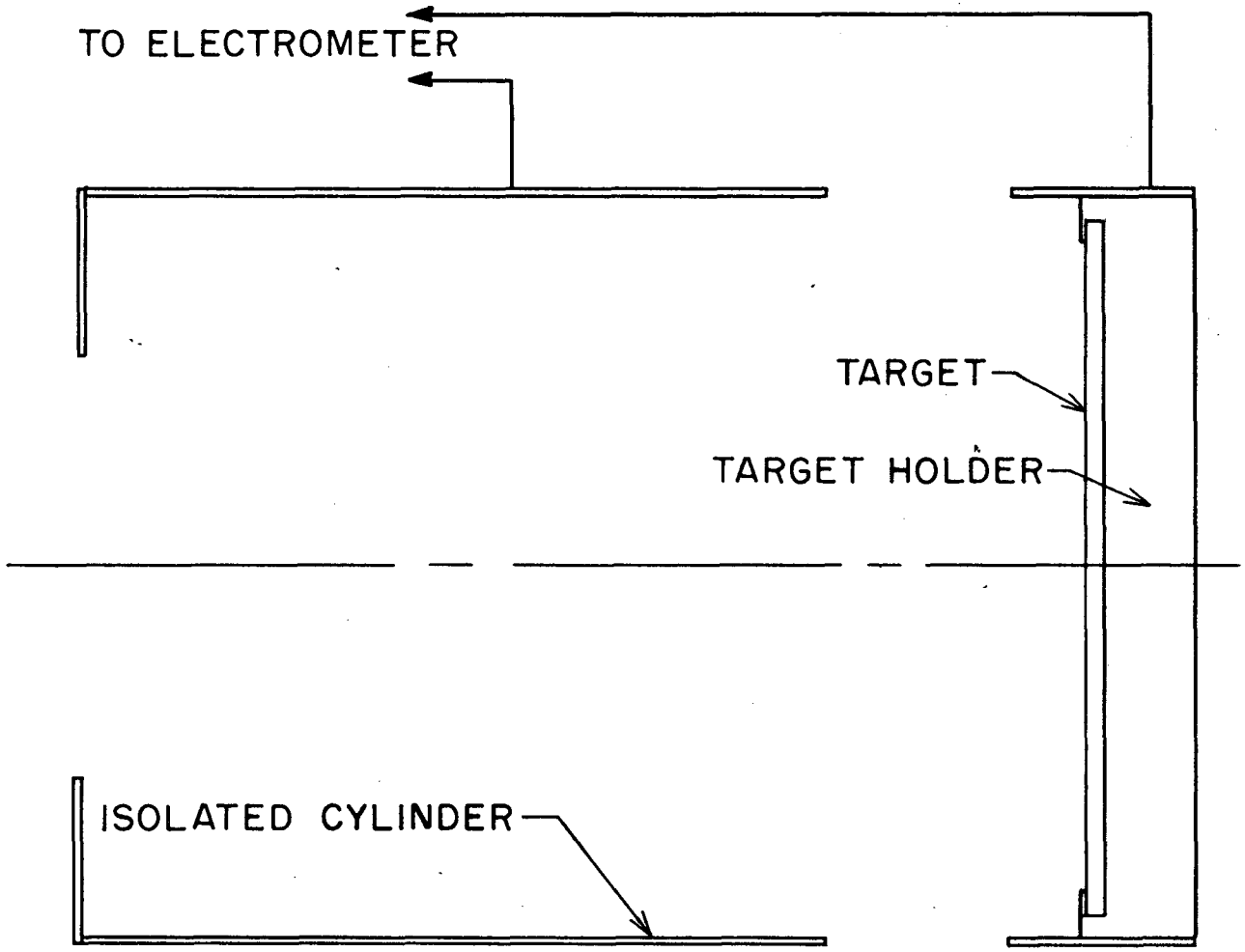

Fig 2

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