EMISAR: C- and L-band polarimetric and interferometric SAR

Christensen, Erik Lintz; Dall, Jørgen; Skou, Niels; Woelders, Kim; Granholm, Johan; Madsen, Søren Nørvang

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EMISAR: C- AND L-BAND POLARIMETRIC AND INTERFEROMETRIC SAR

E. Lintz Christensen, J. Dall, N. Skou, K. Woelders, J. Granholm, and S. Nørvang Madsen
Danish Center for Remote Sensing, DTU, Dept. for Electromagnetic Systems
B. 348, Technical University of Denmark, DK-2800 Lyngby, Denmark.
Phone: +45 4588 1444, Fax: +45 4593 1634. E-mail: lintz@emi.dtu.dk

ABSTRACT

EMISAR is a C- and L-band fully polarimetric (i.e. 4 complex channels per frequency) synthetic aperture radar designed for remote sensing with high demands for resolution (2 m), polarization discrimination, and absolute radiometric and polarimetric calibration. The present installation has one 3-axes stabilized antenna (C- or L-band) and two flush mounted C-band antennas providing the system with cross track and repeat track interferometric capabilities.

INTRODUCTION

Electromagnetics Institute (EMI) began operating its C-band, vertically polarized, Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) in 1989. The radar has a 100 MHz bandwidth and an 80 km range. A full swath, full resolution real-time processor was completed in 1992. The C-band system has since been upgraded to fully polarimetric capability, and the first test flights took place in the fall of 1993. An additional L-band system with full polarimetric capability and the same resolution and image quality was completed and tested early 1995. The system was upgraded to interferometric capability in 1995 and the work on perfecting the installation and the processing software is ongoing.

The major application of the system is data acquisition for the research of the Danish Center for Remote Sensing (DCRS) which has been established at EMI with funding from the Danish National Research Foundation. The upgrade to polarimetry has been supported by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Community with the intention that EMI will operate the polarimetric SAR for JRC in connection with the intended EARSEC (European Airborne Remote Sensing Capabilities) campaigns. During 1994 and 1995 the SAR system has been used to acquire polarimetric data for EMAC (European Multi-sensor Airborne Campaigns) organized and sponsored by ESA [1].

SAR SYSTEM RADAR HARDWARE

The SAR consists of an airborne system (the SAR sensor including 2 sensors with antennas), and a ground segment (the off-line processing facility). Figure 1 gives an overview of the complete system while Table 1 summarizes the more important performance parameters of the sensor.
mapping. However, the present pod has only room for one antenna, i.e. either L- or C-band. The radar electronics has been designed for simultaneous L- and C-band operation.

**DUAL FREQUENCY AND INTERFEROMETRY**

In 1995 one RDAF Gulfstream aircraft was augmented with two flush mounted antennas primarily intended for interferometric SAR applications. However, both antennas are fully polarimetric thus this installation offers a possibility for simultaneous dual frequency operation, although not at zero Doppler. The data rate needed for the squinted operation with the present hardware does not permit full resolution/swath dual frequency operation with full polarimetry.

The flush mounted installation presently has a physical baseline of 1.1 m and topographic mapping (aiming at producing digital elevation models) with this system has already been demonstrated [2]. The complete installation, having one antenna in the pod and two flush mounted antennas, also has the capability of along track interferometry although that feature has not yet been tested.

The system has been extended to support repeat track interferometry (RTI) but this mode is still under development. Very accurate track geometry is possible by the SAR control computer emulating an ILS receiver making actual tracks deviate only a few meter from the desired. Very high resolution topographic mapping and change detection are possible although the method does require a challenging off-line processing [3].

**ANTENNAS**

The antenna for C-band is a dual polarized 32x7 element microstrip antenna designed to approximate a modified cosec-squared elevation radiation pattern for optimum illumination of the ground. The design has achieved high polarization discrimination. [4], [5].

The L-band antenna is a dual polarized 8x2 element microstrip antenna with even better high polarization discrimination. In order to obtain the required bandwidth the elements are stacked microstrip patches [6].

The antenna designs have furthermore been optimized to improve the system azimuth sidelobe performance [7]. Some of the more important antenna parameters are listed for both frequencies in Table 1.

The antenna attitude is automatically controlled. The antenna depression is set-up before each mapping to give the appropriate illumination of the target area. The aircraft attitude is measured by an inertial navigation unit (INU) located next to the antenna, and the antenna pointing is continuously updated to compensate for aircraft motion during mapping.
THE SENSORS

The two sensors, one for C-band and one for L-band are identical except for the microwave subsystems.

Digitally generated modulation waveforms are converted to an I, Q pair of baseband signals which are upconverted, amplified, and then guided to the antennas. The signals received by the antennas are amplified and downconverted to an I, Q pair of baseband signals. The analog subsystems are temperature regulated to assure high stability.

The I, Q baseband signals are digitized to 8 bit samples at 100 MHz and the received baseband signals is range pre-filtering (if reduced bandwidth and wider swath has been requested), double buffered, first order motion compensated, and azimuth pre-filtered and decimated to the requested pixel spacing. The pre-processed data are sent to the high density digital tape recorder (HDDT) which has sufficient capacity for the necessary ancillary information plus the output of both sensors at 1.5 m pixel spacing (240 Mbit/s). The data are also sent to the real-time processor, [8], [9], which performs the SAR processing at full swath and resolution of one channel (although with some limitations at L-band and for squinted data).

The HDDT can accept all 8 channels at 1.5 m pixel spacing which is sufficient only when the signals are recorded at zero Doppler (a limitation of the existing azimuth pre-filter). With the present installation one sensor will use the flush mounted antennas and thus simultaneous dual frequency polarimetric operation is not yet supported at the highest resolution with a full swath.

ABSOLUTE CALIBRATION

The SAR system has been designed and thoroughly tested to provide absolute radiometrically and polarimetrically calibrated data. This is accomplished by 1) having a very stable system, 2) performing internal calibration of this system immediately before and after each data take, and 3) by performing an absolute calibration at each mission using external standards.

EMISAR employs a unique internal calibration system which greatly relieves the dependence on external calibration targets: by measuring system parameters via internal signal processing at full swath and resolution of one channel (although with some limitations at L-band and for squinted data).

Table 2. L-band and C-band impulse response statistics based on 2.0 m trihedrals (average ±standard deviation).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>L-band</th>
<th>C-band</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 dB resolution (m)</td>
<td>2.05 ± 0.02</td>
<td>1.97 ± 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSLR (dB)</td>
<td>-25.2 ± 2.0</td>
<td>-31.9 ± 2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISLR (dB)</td>
<td>-25.1 ± 2.4</td>
<td>-29.8 ± 2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Standard deviation of residual calibration errors after internal calibration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>TX imbalance</th>
<th>RX imbalance</th>
<th>Absolute cal.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L-band</td>
<td>0.12 dB 1.1°</td>
<td>0.20 dB 2.2°</td>
<td>0.51 dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-band</td>
<td>0.07 dB 1.2°</td>
<td>0.14 dB 1.6°</td>
<td>0.05 dB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ously shown good results for AIRSAR data, it has been used \footnote{1} in an enhanced version providing 4 channels - to estimate the rather small residual cross-talk from the EMISAR data. Recent results seem to question that natural targets in general can be assumed to have sufficient azimuthal symmetry. Therefore EMISAR data, considering their low intrinsic cross-talk, are usually not cross-talk corrected.

**PROCESSING CAPACITY**

The processing of SAR data to quality images used to be a very time consuming task for standard computers. However, with 3 of today's fast RISC work stations with adequate RAM the computer capacity for processing polarimetric SAR data in excess of 1000 fully polarimetric (i.e. 4 channels, 12 by 12 km, 2 by 2 m resolution) scenes a year. With the recent acquisition of a parallel computer facility the computer capacity is not the problem. However, bottlenecks during HDDT transcription, lack of automated set-up in parts of the processing chain and output product generation presently limits the actual throughput to a somewhat lower number. The HDDT reliability is a weak link. Presently the actual processing throughput is around 10 polarimetric scenes per week. Work on automating the entire processing chain is in progress and further improvements of the capacity is expected during the summer of 1996.

**REFERENCES**

\footnote{1} J. Dall, S. Nørvang Madsen, H. Skriver, S. Savstrup Kristensen, and E. Lintz Christensen, “EMISAR De-\footnote{3} ployment in the EMAC ‘94 Campaign”, Electromagnetics Institute, The Technical University of Denmark, Lyngby, Denmark, R 600, Sept. 1994.


