Retrieval of Atmospheric Water Vapor Density With Fine Spatial Resolution Using Three-Dimensional Tomographic Inversion of Microwave Brightness Temperatures Measured by a Network of Scanning Compact Radiometers

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Abstract—Quantitative precipitation forecasting is currently limited by the paucity of observations on sufficiently fine temporal and spatial scales. Three-dimensional water vapor fields can be retrieved with improved spatial coverage from measurements obtained using a network of scanning microwave radiometers. To investigate this potential, an observation system simulation experiment was performed in which synthetic examples of retrievals using a network of radiometers were compared with results from the Weather Research and Forecasting model at a grid scale of 500 m. These comparisons show that the 3-D water vapor field can be retrieved with an accuracy of better than 15%–20%. A ground-based demonstration network of three compact microwave radiometers was deployed at the Atmospheric Radiation Measurement Southern Great Plains site in Oklahoma. Results using these network measurements demonstrated the first retrieval of the 3-D water vapor field in the troposphere at fine spatial and temporal resolutions.

Index Terms—Atmospheric measurement, electromagnetic tomography, humidity measurement, microwave radiometry, remote sensing, water vapor.

I. INTRODUCTION

WATER vapor is both the most abundant and the most variable greenhouse gas in the atmosphere. It affects the Earth’s radiation budget, energy transfer, cloud formation, and precipitation distribution. Water vapor affects radiation transfer by absorbing both downwelling solar and upwelling longwave radiation. Water vapor also affects energy transfer because the latent heat of vaporization is a principal mechanism for the transport of energy from the equatorial regions to higher latitudes. The energy released when vapor condenses to form clouds is a substantial driver of the dynamics of the atmosphere. This latent heat release modifies the vertical stability of the atmosphere, influencing weather systems and their associated precipitation patterns. Convective storms have been observed to develop in regions of strong and rapidly evolving moisture gradients with spatial variations on submeso γ scales (2–5 km) [1]–[3]. Improving and extending the available techniques of water vapor measurement have been identified as a key research area by the U.S. Weather Research Program [4]. Measurements of water vapor aloft with high time resolution and fine spatial resolution have the potential to improve forecast skill for the initiation of convective storms [4]. Such measurements may be used for assimilation into and validation of numerical weather prediction (NWP) models [5].

Water vapor in the troposphere is highly variable, both temporally and spatially. Vertical profiles of water vapor are typically measured using instrumented weather balloons known as radiosondes. However, radiosondes are launched operationally from U.S. National Weather Service locations separated by an average of 315 km (http://www.ofcm.gov/fmh3/text/chapter1.htm). Radiosondes are not reusable, restricting their launch to twice daily, 0 and 12 UTC, at most stations. Currently, water vapor profiling by commercial radiometers is limited to retrieving vertical water vapor profiles using observations from a single radiometer at a variety of elevation and azimuth angles [6]–[8]. Due to the relatively high cost of currently available microwave radiometers, measurements of the horizontal variability of water vapor aloft at scales smaller than tens of kilometers have not been available.
Improving quantitative precipitation forecasts is an important and scientifically challenging objective [9]. Improvements are needed in forecasting the location and amount of precipitation, as well as in understanding the underlying mechanisms and processes of convective initiation [10]. Despite their importance to quantitative precipitation forecasting, current observational technologies for measuring water vapor aloft are inadequate, in part due to insufficient sampling.

In addition to these remote sampling considerations, the accuracy of in situ measurements has been inadequate. Humidity biases in radiosonde data that often exceed 5% throughout the troposphere have been recently identified and partially corrected [11], [12]. The capacitive polymer hygrometer introduced dry bias errors of 6.8% in RS80 radiosonde data. A humidity sensor boom cover introduced by Vaisala in late 2000 reduced this error to 3.9% [13]. Residual dry bias errors in the current RS92 radiosondes are still larger during the day than at night by 5%–7% [13]. These dry bias errors have a significant impact on long-term climate measurements. When not sufficiently corrected, such biases can change the quantitative and qualitative interpretation of spatial and temporal variations in convective available potential energy and convective inhibition [14].

Table I describes currently available 3-D water vapor measurement techniques. Currently, water vapor density profiles are obtained in situ using hygrometers on radiosondes and remotely using lidars [15], [16], ground-based GPS slant-path delay [17], [18], and satellite radio occultation [19], [20], as well as a small number of spaceborne microwave radiometers [21], [22]. In situ radiosonde measurements have excellent vertical resolution but are severely limited in temporal and spatial coverages. In addition, each radiosonde takes 45–60 min to ascend from the ground to the tropopause and is typically advected by upper level winds up to several tens of kilometers in horizontal displacement from its launch site. Differential-absorption lidars measure water vapor with resolution that is comparable to that of radiosondes during only clear-sky conditions from a very limited number of sites [23]. Tomographic inversion applied to ground-based measurements of GPS slant path delay is expected to yield 0.5–1-km vertical resolution at 30-min intervals [17], [18], [24]. In contrast, microwave radiometers can provide nearly continuous measurements of weighted path-integrated water vapor and liquid water in the troposphere. Ground-based microwave radiometers perform such measurements with high temporal resolution and in both clear and cloudy conditions. Water vapor products derived from COSMIC (Constellation Observing System for Meteorology, Ionosphere and Climate) and CHAMP (CHAllenging Minisatellite Payload) using the GPS radio occultation technique have vertical resolutions on the order of 100–500 m [19]. However, the horizontal resolution of the retrieved moisture profiles ranges from 200 to 600 km, depending on the magnitude of the path-integrated refractivity. In addition, the accuracy of the path-integrated water vapor retrieval depends strongly on the accuracy of temperature profiles that are available from operational meteorological analyses such as the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts [19].

On the other hand, the prediction of convective initiation requires the knowledge of water vapor variations on submeso scales (2–5 km) [1]–[3]. Networks of ground-based multifrequency microwave radiometers have the potential to provide improved vertical, horizontal, and temporal resolutions of water vapor fields. Extending our earlier work [25], this paper demonstrates the implementation of tomographic inversion and spatial interpolation techniques to retrieve the 3-D structure of water vapor in the troposphere with fine spatial and temporal resolutions. The need for deployment of multiple microwave radiometers in a remote sensor network motivated a compact sensor design with low mass, low cost, and low power consumption [26].

In this paper, we present a new remote sensing technique to retrieve the 3-D water vapor field with finer spatial resolution than is currently available. This retrieval is achieved by using tomographic inversion of brightness temperatures measured by a ground-based network (ultimately multiple interconnected networks) of compact microwave radiometers scanning in elevation and azimuth. Section II describes the Compact Microwave Radiometer for Humidity Profiling (CMR-H) [26] and the 1-D water vapor profile retrieval from conventional zenith-pointing measurements. This section includes the correction of brightness temperatures for antenna beamwidth and sidelobe errors. Section III focuses on quantifying the spatial scales of water vapor variation through estimation of correlation distances from semivariograms of outputs of fine-resolution NWP models. The resulting spatial information is applied in the retrieval to calculate water vapor densities in unsampled regions using kriging or spatial interpolation techniques. Section IV describes tomographic reconstruction of the 3-D water vapor field from brightness temperature measurements performed by multiple scanning radiometers in a network that view the same atmospheric volumes from multiple perspectives. The network topology used to demonstrate this reconstruction is an equilateral triangle with compact microwave radiometers at each of its vertices. This section describes the forward model and inversion using tomographic reconstruction techniques. To achieve this requires the regularization of the Jacobian matrix, the use of the absorption line shape to retrieve water vapor densities from the water vapor absorption coefficient, and the use of the kriging techniques described in Section III.
In Section V, an observation system simulation experiment (OSSE) is used to determine the expected accuracy of the 3-D water vapor retrieval technique. An appropriate scanning strategy is developed for an equilateral-triangle network with a nearest neighbor distance of 10 km. Section VI describes the first retrieval of the 3-D water vapor field in the troposphere at fine spatial and temporal resolutions from microwave brightness temperature measurements. These measurements were obtained using a three-node ground-based remote sensing network. The network was deployed at the Atmospheric Radiation Measurement (ARM) Southern Great Plains (SGP) site in Billings, OK. Three-dimensional humidity images were obtained at a variety of altitudes using the new remote sensing technique described in Sections IV and V. Finally, Section VII provides conclusions.

II. FIELD MEASUREMENTS USING A SINGLE COMPACT MICROWAVE RADIOMETER

To obtain high-resolution ground-based measurements of humidity in the troposphere, the Microwave Systems Laboratory at Colorado State University (CSU) has designed, fabricated, tested, and deployed the CMR-H. The design of the CMR-H took advantage of state-of-the-art monolithic microwave integrated circuit technology and packaging to achieve small size ($24 \times 18 \times 16$ cm$^3$), light weight (6 kg), and low power consumption (25–50 W, depending on local weather conditions) [26]. External two-point calibration of the CMR-H uses a tipping curve consisting of sky measurements at 1.25, 1.5, 1.75, 2.0, and 2.25 atmospheres to extrapolate to the “cold” calibration reference of the cosmic background temperature of 2.73 K. The “hot” calibration reference is obtained by measuring a microwave absorber whose temperature is measured precisely using an array of temperature sensing elements. The selection of the four CMR-H frequency channels, i.e., 22.12, 22.67, 23.25, and 24.50 GHz, was based on information content studies performed by Solheim et al. [27] and Scheve and Swift [28], wherein water vapor density weighting functions were calculated as a function of frequency near the 22.235-GHz water vapor absorption line to determine the ensemble of frequencies with maximum information content for retrieval of the tropospheric water vapor profile. In addition, these studies helped to identify frequency channels which provide no new information, since their weighting functions are merely a linear combination of those at other channels.

A. Field Measurements Using a Single CMR-H

The CMR-H was deployed to perform field measurements at National Center for Atmospheric Research’s Mesa Laboratory as part of the Refractivity Experiment For H$_2$O Research And Collaborative operational Technology Transfer (REFRACTT’06) from June 21 to August 11, 2006 [25], [29]. The scientific goal of REFRACTT’06 was to obtain very high resolution measurements of water vapor variability and transport in the convective boundary layer using a wide variety of observational techniques. A secondary goal was to assess potential improvements in NWP of precipitation due to the availability of enhanced water vapor measurements. The CMR-H performed colocated measurements with a commercially available Radiometrics WVP-1500 five-channel profiler radiometer. Table II provides the specifications of the two radiometers.

During REFRACTT’06, brightness temperatures were measured by the CMR-H as well as by the Radiometrics WVP-1500 (http://www.radiometrics.com) in the conventional zenith-pointing configuration. Fig. 1 shows a comparison of the time series of brightness temperatures measured by the CMR-H and the Radiometrics WVP-1500 at 22.235 GHz. The brightness temperatures measured at the four CMR-H frequency channels were interpolated to obtain the brightness temperature at 22.235 GHz using the Van-Vleck Weisskopf (VVW) water vapor absorption line shape [30]. Vaisala RS-92 radiosondes were launched from the location of the CMR-H for measurement comparison. The relative humidity accuracy of RS-92 radiosondes is approximately 5% in the lower troposphere and 10% in the middle and upper troposphere [31].

An example of a water vapor density profile retrieved from CMR-H measurements on August 11, 2006 is shown in Fig. 2. Brightness temperatures measured at the four frequencies of CMR-H were used to retrieve the water vapor profile, as described in the next section. Different retrieval techniques were used in retrieving water vapor density profiles from CMR-H and WVR-1500 measurements. Bayesian optimal estimation method was used in retrieving water vapor density from CMR-H measurements, whereas a neural-network-based method was used in the case of WVP-1500 [8]. The profile retrieved from the CMR-H measurements agrees well with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Colorado State CMR-H</th>
<th>Radiometrics WVP-1500</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency Channels (GHz)</td>
<td>22.12, 22.67, 23.25, 24.50</td>
<td>22.235, 23.035, 23.835, 26.235 and 30.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity (K) @ 1-sec integration time</td>
<td>0.2 - 0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-dB Antenna Beamwidth(°)</td>
<td>3.0 - 4.0</td>
<td>5.0 - 6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calibration</td>
<td>Internal: Noise Diode and Reference Load</td>
<td>Internal: Noise diode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External: Tipping curve, Microwave absorber at ambient temperature and LN$_2$</td>
<td></td>
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![Fig. 1. Comparison of time series of brightness temperatures measured by CMR-H and Radiometrics WVP-1500 five-channel water vapor profiler.](image-url)
corresponding to the surface and the top of the atmosphere, respectively. The weighting function \( W(f, z) \) expresses the fractional contribution of the atmospheric emission at altitude \( z \) to the brightness temperature \( T_B \) at the frequency \( f \). The function \( g(z) \) is the distribution function of an atmospheric parameter. In this case, \( g(z) = \rho_v(z) \), the water vapor density as a function of altitude \( z \).

Modeling the atmosphere as a set of layers with uniform thickness \( \Delta z \) and expressing (1) in a discrete form, microwave emission from the altitudes between \( z \) and \( z + \Delta z \) contributes an amount \( W(f, z)g(z)\Delta z \) (in kelvins) to the brightness temperature \( T_B \) at the frequency \( f \). As a consequence, the total measured brightness temperature at this radiometer frequency will be given by (1). A weighting function for a specific atmospheric parameter represents the change in the measured brightness temperature due to a unit change in that parameter as a function of altitude. The weighting function for the water vapor density \( \rho_v(z) \) at height \( z \) and at the frequency \( f \) is defined as [32]

\[
W(f, z) = \lim_{\Delta z \to 0} \frac{\delta T_B}{\delta \rho_v(z)\Delta z}.
\]

From (2), the weighting function for the water vapor is derived as [33]

\[
W_{\rho_v}(f, z) = \frac{\partial \kappa_a(z)}{\partial \rho_v(z)} [T(z) - T_B(f, z)] e^{-\tau(0,z;f)}
\]

where \( \kappa_a(z) \) is the water vapor absorption coefficient at altitude \( z \), \( \rho_v(z) \) is the water vapor density at altitude \( z \), \( T_B(f, z) \) is the brightness temperature corrected to account for the effect of nonzero antenna beamwidth, \( T(z) \) is the air temperature at altitude \( z \), and \( \tau \) is the atmospheric opacity. The brightness temperature \( T_B(\theta, \phi) \) measured by a radiometer at a specified frequency \( f \), elevation angle \( \theta \), and azimuth angle \( \phi \) is a weighted average of background brightness temperatures \( T_B(\eta, \xi) \) from all elevation \( \eta \) and azimuth directions \( \xi \) and is given by [30]

\[
T_B(\theta, \phi) = \int_0^{2\pi} \int_0^{2\pi} P(\theta, \phi; \eta, \xi) T_B(\eta, \xi) \sin(\eta) \, d\eta \, d\xi
\]

where \( P(\theta, \phi; \eta, \xi) \) is the power pattern of the radiometer antenna. \( T_B(\theta, \phi) \), the brightness temperature measured by the radiometer, exceeds the brightness temperature \( T_B^0 \) that would be measured by an infinitesimally narrow-beam antenna aimed at the boresight of the radiometer antenna. The difference \( \delta T_B(\theta, \phi) = T_B(\theta, \phi) - T_B^0 \) is a function of the antenna beamwidth as well as the amount and distribution of atmospheric water vapor [34]. Assuming the radiometer antenna pattern to be Gaussian, this difference \( \delta T_B \) is

\[
\delta T_B(\theta) = \frac{\theta_{1/2}^2}{16 \ln 2} (T_{\text{CMB}} - T_{\text{CMB}}) e^{-\tau(\theta)}
\]

where \( \theta_{1/2} \) is the half-power (3-dB) beamwidth in radians, \( T_{\text{CMB}} \) is the cosmic microwave background radiation

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**Fig. 2.** Comparison of water vapor density profiles measured by radiosonde with those retrieved from microwave brightness temperatures measured by CMR-H and Radiometrics WVP-1500 radiometers.

**Fig. 3.** Trajectory of a radiosonde launched on August 11, 2006.
(a constant 2.73 K, since galactic radiation is negligible for our purposes above ~3 GHz), $T_{mv}$ is the mean radiating temperature, given by

$$T_{mv}(\theta) = \frac{\int_0^\infty T(z)e^{-\tau(\theta)} d\tau(\theta)}{1 - e^{-\tau(\infty, \delta)}}$$

(6)

and $\tau(\theta)$ is the slant path opacity at elevation angle $\theta$ given by

$$\tau(\theta) = \int_0^H \kappa(s) ds.$$  

(7)

$T_{mv}$ and $\tau(\theta)$ are calculated using radiosonde profiles for the 1-D case and the reference profile for the 3-D case. After removing the contribution due to nonzero beamwidth, the corrected brightness temperature $T_B'$ is used as the input to the 1-D inversion algorithm is given by

$$T_B' = T_B - \delta T_B.$$  

(8)

For a zenith-pointing measurement, the discrete form of the weighting function $W$ is an $m \times n$ matrix, where $m$ is the number of measured frequency channels and $n$ is the number of altitudes at which the water vapor density is to be retrieved. Since the inversion of the measurements to retrieve geophysical quantities requires finding the inverse of a certain extent by restricting the class of admissible solutions to a set of physically realizable solutions. In this regard, the Bayesian optimal estimation technique [7], [9], [35] was chosen to retrieve the water vapor density profile using the measured brightness temperatures at the four frequencies of the CMR-H. Bayes’ theorem provides a formalism to invert the forward model and calculate an a posteriori probability density function (pdf) by updating the prior pdf with a measurement pdf. The water vapor density inversion equation is given by

$$\rho_v = \rho_{v,a} + S_{\rho_{v,a}} W^T (W S_{\rho_{v,a}} W^T + S_{T_B})^{-1} (T_B' - W \rho_{v,a})$$  

(9)

where $\rho_v$ is the water vapor density profile, $\rho_{v,a}$ is the a priori profile, in this case, the 0 UTC RAOB performed at the Denver/Stapleton weather station (Station ID: 72469), $S_{\rho_{v,a}}$ is the error covariance matrix of the a priori water vapor profile, and $S_{T_B}$ is the error covariance matrix for the measured brightness temperatures. The measurement errors of the four radiometric channels are assumed to be statistically independent.

Equation (9) gives a nonunique solution for $\rho_v$. Therefore, the retrieval is performed by selecting a water vapor profile that minimizes the cost function in the form of [7]

$$J(\rho_v) = [T_B' - W \rho_v]^T S_{T_B}^{-1} [T_B' - W \rho_v] + [\rho_v - \rho_{v,a}]^T S_{\rho_v}^{-1} [\rho_v - \rho_{v,a}].$$  

(10)

To minimize the cost function numerically, the Gauss–Newton method was used to solve for the water vapor density iteratively as

$$\rho_{v,i+1} = \rho_{v,i} + [W S_{\rho_{v,a}} W^T (W S_{\rho_{v,a}} W^T + S_{T_B})^{-1}]^{-1} \delta \rho_v(i)$$

where $\rho_v$ and $\rho_{v,i}$ are the water vapor profiles before and after iteration $i$ and $W_s$ is the weighting function matrix for iteration $i$. $W$ is calculated for each iteration using (3). Equation (11) is a modified version of (9) for computing the iterative solution.

The errors in the a priori water vapor density and measured brightness temperatures are modeled as multidimensional zero-mean normal distributions with covariance matrices $S_{\rho_{v,a}}$ and $S_{T_B}$, respectively. The covariance of the observation vector $T_B'$ (with dimension $m$) is an $m \times m$ square matrix. The covariance of the a priori water vapor density $\rho_{v,a}$ (with dimension $n$) is an $n \times n$ square matrix. The main diagonal of each covariance matrix contains a set of variances of each variable; the off-diagonal elements contain cross-covariances between each pair of variables. In Bayesian optimal estimation, the a priori error covariance matrix provides information about the accuracy of the a priori of the retrieved state vector, in this case water vapor density. The error covariance matrix of the a priori water vapor density $S_{\rho_{v,a}}$ was constructed based on a first-order Markov process, given by

$$S_{\rho_{v,a}}(x, y) = \sigma_a^2 e^{-|x-y|^{\frac{2}{h}}}$$

(12)

where $x$ and $y$ are the row and column indices of the error covariance matrix, respectively, $\sigma_a$’s are the variances of the a priori water vapor densities, $h$ is the length scale, empirically estimated as 6 km, and $\delta z$ is the altitude spacing. $S_{\rho_{v,a}}$ is an $n \times n$ square matrix. The main diagonal elements of the error covariance matrix $S_{T_B}$ of the measured brightness temperatures describe the uncertainty in the measurements, assumed to be $\sigma_T^2 = (0.5 K)^2$. This value was obtained from the standard deviation of a long time series (~3000 s) of stable sky brightness temperatures measured by CMR-H.

In Section IV, the 1-D retrieval method explained in this section is extended to a 3-D tomographic inversion technique for retrieval of the 3-D water vapor field from brightness temperatures measured by a remote sensor network of CMR-Hs. To accomplish this, it is first necessary to study the spatial variability of water vapor, as described in Section III.

III. SPATIAL VARIABILITY OF TROPOSPHERIC WATER VAPOR

Knowledge of the spatial scales of water vapor variability at a variety of altitudes is important to infer the spatial resolution of water vapor measurements required to determine where and when atmospheric conditions are likely to lead to convection based on rapidly evolving moisture gradients. The mesoscale and submesoscale variability of water vapor plays an important role in the understanding of cloud formation and nonlinear processes such as radiative transfer. In the study of Deeter and Evans [1], measurements using NASA’s Millimeter-wave Imaging Radiometer during the Tropical Ocean Global
Atmosphere Coupled Ocean Atmosphere Response Experiment were used to obtain the mesoscale variations of water vapor. An autocorrelation analysis showed that mid-to-upper tropospheric water vapor content varies on submeso scales (less than 2–5 km).

The spatial scales of water vapor variability in the troposphere were calculated using outputs of a fine-resolution Weather Research and Forecasting (WRF) model with a 500-m resolution [36]. The WRF model is a next-generation mesoscale and submesoscale NWP system designed for operational forecasting as well as atmospheric science research. It includes a 3-D variational data assimilation system as well as a software architecture that permits computational extensibility. The WRF model is suitable for a broad range of applications on scales ranging from meters to thousands of kilometers. Such applications include research and operational NWP, data assimilation, and parameterized-physics research.

To estimate the spatial correlation statistics of water vapor in the troposphere, a WRF model output with a 500-m grid resolution was used to simulate a cold front and deep convection in northwest Indiana (40.7° N, 86° W) from 2:00 UTC to 3:00 UTC. This model output was also used in the OSSE described in Section V. The spatial correlation statistics of geophysical variables are typically analyzed using spatial autocorrelation functions [37], [38]. A geostatistic used to describe the spatial correlation in the data is the semivariogram, defined as

\[
\Gamma(d) = \frac{1}{2m_d} \sum_{i=1}^{m_d} [\rho_i(x_i, y_i) - \rho_i(x_j, y_j)]^2
\]  

(13)

where \(m_d\) is the number of pairs of points in the data set, in this case the WRF model output, at a distance \(d\) from each other.

Semivariograms for water vapor densities were calculated from the WRF model output using (13). As shown in Fig. 4, the semivariogram increases as the distance \(d\) increases. The slope of the semivariogram is steep for small distances and changes until, at a particular distance, the slope transitions to a minimum relatively constant value for the remainder of the semivariogram. The correlation distance is defined as the distance at which this transition occurs. Various functions have been used to find a best fit to the semivariogram curve [37], [38]. An exponential model (14) was fit to the semivariograms for the WRF model water vapor density outputs at a variety of altitudes to estimate the correlation distances

\[
\Gamma(d) = c_0 + c(1 - e^{-d/a})
\]  

(14)

where \(c_0\) is the variance at zero distance, \(c\) is the sill variance when the distance is maximum, and \(a\) is the correlation distance. Semivariograms are different for each altitude level. The semivariogram plots for 3-km and 5-km above ground level (AGL) at 3:00 UTC are shown in Fig. 4. Fig. 5 shows the correlation distances as a function of time at the same two altitudes. The correlation distances and the semivariogram values for the WRF model output were used to calculate the parameters for spatial interpolation, as described in Section IV.

Section IV describes the tomographic reconstruction of the 3-D water vapor field from brightness temperature measurements performed by three radiometers in a remote sensor network.

IV. TOMOGRAPHIC RECONSTRUCTION OF THE TROPOSPHERIC WATER VAPOR FIELD

Retrieval of the 3-D water vapor field from brightness temperature measurements using a network of ground-based radiometers is analytically similar to the fanbeam projection technique commonly used in medical imaging [39]. However, the requirements for performing fanbeam projection with sufficient accuracy are to measure a large number (~1000) of projections and to measure projections that are uniformly distributed over 180° or 360°. It is not practical to satisfy both of these requirements using a ground-based network of radiometers. However, problems of this type may be more amenable to the use of algebraic reconstruction tomography (ART) techniques [39]. The ART approach to tomographic imaging involves setting up algebraic equations to solve for the unknown targets in terms of the measured projection data. This section describes the formulation of the forward model for the measured brightness temperatures, the inversion of the brightness temperatures to obtain the water vapor absorption coefficients, the ART of the water vapor absorption coefficients, and the retrieval of water vapor using its absorption line shape. Finally, kriging is used to estimate the water vapor at unsampled locations. Kriging, in turn, uses the spatial correlation distances of water vapor density discussed in Section III.

The forward radiative transfer model uses known water vapor densities, either measured or from WRF model outputs, to calculate the expected radiometer brightness temperatures [33], [35], [40] as

\[
T_B = T_{CMB} + \int_0^{z} k_{\text{abs}}(z') T(z') e^{-\tau(z',z')} dz'
\]  

(15)

where \(T_B\) is the brightness temperature in Kelvin, \(z\) is the height of the tropopause in kilometers, \(k_{\text{abs}}\) is the absorption coefficient at a particular altitude in nepers per kilometer, \(\tau\) is the optical depth, as defined in Section II-B, and \(T_{CMB}\) is the cosmic microwave background radiation. If the scanned domain is divided into \(M\) grid cells, the forward model can be expressed in a discrete form as

\[
T_{Bi} = T_{CMB} e^{-\sum_{j=1}^{M} k_{\text{abs},j} \Delta r_{ij}} + \sum_{j=1}^{M} k_{\text{abs},j} T_j e^{-\tau_{ij}} \Delta r_{ij}
\]  

(16)
where $T_{B_i}$ is the brightness temperature measured by a radiometer pointing at the $i$th elevation angle $\theta_i$, $k_{\text{abs, } j}$ is the absorption coefficient in the $j$th grid cell, $T_j$ is the air temperature in the $j$th grid cell, $\Delta r_{ij}$ is the length of the section of the ray at the $i$th elevation angle in the $j$th grid cell, and the opacity $\tau_{ij}$ is given as

$$\tau_{ij} = \sum_{m=1}^{j-1} k_{\text{abs, } m} \Delta r_{im}.$$

We linearize this forward model by replacing the exponential term in (16) with the first two terms of its Taylor series and temporarily ignoring the effect of the cosmic background radiation to obtain

$$T_{B_i} = \sum_{j=1}^{M} k_{\text{abs, } j} T_j \left( 1 - \sum_{l=1}^{j-1} k_{\text{abs, } l} \Delta r_{il} \right) \Delta r_{ij}.$$

Having formulated the forward model, a reference profile of the pressure, temperature, and water vapor density for a typical midlatitude summer reference atmospheric profile was used in the OSSE described in Section V. The absorption coefficient in each grid cell was calculated at the CMR-H frequencies using state-of-the-art absorption models [41]–[43]. The midlatitude summer reference atmospheric profile was used in the OSSE described in Section V. The absorption coefficient in each grid cell was calculated at the CMR-H frequencies using state-of-the-art absorption models [41]–[43]. The variations in the absorption coefficients in each grid cell from their reference values are calculated as

$$\Delta K = K_{\text{abs}} - K_{\text{abs ref}}$$

and the variations in the calculated brightness temperatures at each elevation angle $\theta_i$ from their reference values are

$$\Delta T_B = T_B - T_{\text{B ref}}$$

where $K_{\text{abs}}$ and $K_{\text{abs ref}}$ are vectors with elements $k_{\text{abs}}$ and $k_{\text{abs ref}}$, respectively.

In addition, the differencing operation in obtaining $\Delta T_B$ significantly reduces any effect of the nonzero antenna beamwidth and sidelobes. For the 3-D water vapor retrieval, the effects of antenna beamwidth and sidelobes on the $\Delta T_B$ term are significantly smaller than the measurement uncertainty in the error covariance matrix and hence are neglected. The $\Delta T_B$ and $\Delta K$ vectors are then related by a Jacobian matrix $G$ as

$$\Delta T_B = G \cdot \Delta K.$$

Therefore, the elements of the Jacobian matrix $G$ are $g_{ij}$'s, the partial derivatives of the change in the brightness temperature at the $i$th elevation angle with respect to the change in absorption coefficient in the $j$th grid cell, given by

$$g_{ij} = \frac{\partial (\Delta T_{B_i})}{\partial (\Delta K_j)}.$$

The variations in the retrieved absorption coefficients $\Delta K$ as a function of measured variations in brightness temperatures $\Delta T_B$ are determined as

$$\Delta K = \text{Inv}(G) \ast \Delta T_B.$$

Since $G$ is not a square matrix, the inverse of $G$ does not exist. We therefore use a regularized inverse of $G$, as explained hereinafter.

The number of nonzero eigenvalues of $G$ was calculated to find a set of elevation angles with minimum redundancy. The number of eigenvalues is equal to the number of independent ray intersections with unique grid cells. Fig. 6 shows the number of eigenvalues as a function of the number of elevation angles measured by a scanning radiometer. Solving (23) by computing the inverse of the Jacobian matrix $G$ is an ill-posed problem, so no unique solution for $\Delta K$ exists. Regularization techniques are needed to solve such ill-posed problems. In this paper, we use the Bayesian optimal estimation method to retrieve $\Delta K$ as

$$\Delta K = \Delta K_{a \text{ priori}} + S_{\Delta K_{a \text{ priori}}} G_T \left( G S_{\Delta K_{a \text{ priori}}} G_T + S_{\Delta T_B} \right)^{-1} \times \left[ \Delta T_B - G \Delta K_{a \text{ priori}} \right].$$
where \( S_{\Delta K_{a \text{ prior}}(t)} \) is the error covariance matrix of the \textit{a priori} absorption coefficients and \( S_{\Delta T_B} \) is the error covariance matrix of the measured brightness temperatures.

Given \( \Delta T_B \) with error statistics \( S_{\Delta T_B} \), \textit{a priori} geophysical state vector \( \Delta K_{a \text{ prior}} \) with covariance matrix \( S_{\Delta K_{a \text{ prior}}} \), and a forward model to calculate the measured \( \Delta T_B \) in terms of the state vector, the change in the absorption coefficients \( \Delta K \) is retrieved iteratively by minimizing the cost function (modifying (10) for 3-D retrieval) [7]

\[
J(\Delta K) = [T_B - G\Delta K_{a \text{ prior}}(t)]^T S_{T_B}^{-1} [T_B - G\Delta K_{a \text{ prior}}(t)] + [\Delta K - \Delta K_{a \text{ prior}}(t)]^T S_{\Delta K}^{-1} [\Delta K - \Delta K_{a \text{ prior}}(t)].
\]

The Kalman filter technique is used to estimate the water vapor density in each grid cell by performing retrievals in time sequence and ensuring that the retrieved water vapor densities vary smoothly as a function of time. For this method, the previous measurement provides prior information about the water vapor density at the current time. The sequential evolution of the \textit{a priori} measurement is modeled by using a Kalman filter model evolution parameter \( M_t \), given as [35]

\[
\Delta K_{a \text{ prior}}(t) = M_t (\Delta K_{a \text{ prior}}(t-1))
\]

where \( M_t \) operates sequentially in \( t \). Its elements are

\[
\frac{\partial \Delta K_{a \text{ prior}}(t-1)}{\partial \Delta K_{a \text{ prior}}(t)}.
\]

At time \( t-1 \), an estimate of \( \Delta K_{a \text{ prior}}(t-1) \) is made with an error covariance \( S_{\Delta K_{a \text{ prior}}(t-1)} \). The stochastic prediction equation (26) is used to construct an \textit{a priori} estimate \( \Delta K_{a \text{ prior}}(t) \) and its covariance \( S_{\Delta K_{a \text{ prior}}(t)} \) at time \( t \). These quantities are used in optimal estimation as (24) to provide an updated estimate of the water vapor density. The Jacobian \( G \) has elements shown in (22). The Jacobian \( G \) and the transition matrix \( M_t \) are derived using the WRF model data. For different conditions, \( G \) and \( M_t \) do need to be updated based on the location. The retrieved absorption coefficients in each WRF model grid cell (0.5 km \( \times \) 0.5 km typical horizontal resolution) at the four operating frequencies of CMR-H are then used to compute the water vapor density in the grid cell by performing a nonlinear curve fit to the VVW absorption line shape [30], given as

\[
k_{\text{abs}_{v,j}}(f) = (0.3633 \times 10^3) f^2 \rho_{v,j} \left( \frac{300}{T_j} \right)^{3/2} \gamma \times \left[ \left( \frac{1}{T_j} \right)^{3/2} e^{644 \frac{T_j}{T_j}} \right]^3 \times \left[ \frac{1}{(22.235 - f)^2 + \gamma^2} + \frac{1}{(22.235 + f)^2 + \gamma^2} \right] + 6.6061 \times 10^{-9}
\]

where the linewidth parameter \( \gamma \) with units of GHz is

\[
\gamma = 2.85 \left( \frac{P_j}{1013} \right) \left( \frac{300}{T_j} \right)^{0.626} \left[ 1 + 0.018 \frac{\rho_{v,j} T_j}{P_j} \right]
\]

where \( P_j \) is the pressure, \( T_j \) is the temperature, and \( \rho_{v,j} \) is the water vapor density in the \( j \)th grid cell. The WRF model outputs of pressure and temperature in each grid cell were used in the VVW equation to obtain the curve fits. The water vapor densities in unsampled locations were estimated using spatial interpolation techniques. Kriging provides a solution to the problem of estimation at unsampled grid cells based on a continuous model of stochastic spatial variation [37]. These water vapor densities are calculated using

\[
\rho(x_0) = \sum_{i=1}^{N} \lambda_i \rho(x_i)
\]

where \( \rho(x_0) \) is the water vapor density at location \( x_0 \), \( \rho(x_i) \)'s are the water vapor densities at locations \( i = 1, 2, \ldots, N \), and the weights \( \lambda_i \)'s are normalized as

\[
\sum_{i=1}^{N} \lambda_i = 1.
\]

The \( \lambda_i \)'s are calculated as

\[
\sum_{i=1}^{N} \lambda_i \Gamma(x_i, x_j) + \psi(x_0) = \Gamma(x_j, x_0)
\]

where \( \Gamma(x_i, x_j) \) is a semivariogram between \( x_i \) and \( x_j \), \( \psi(x_0) \) is a Lagrange multiplier, and \( \Gamma(x_j, x_0) \) is the variogram between \( x_j \) and \( x_0 \). The Lagrange multiplier is estimated so that it minimizes the mean square error of the variance of the estimated value. The spatial interpolation is performed independently for each altitude using the correlation distance obtained from the WRF model outputs. The correlation distances obtained from the WRF model were averaged over the duration of the simulation.

In summary, the retrieval process consists of using the brightness temperatures measured by the three radiometers to retrieve the water vapor densities in each observed grid cell. These water vapor densities are then used along with correlation distances of water vapor for each altitude to calculate water vapor densities at unsampled locations to yield the 3-D water vapor field with a horizontal resolution of 500 m and a vertical resolution that varies from 0.5 to 1 km (depending on the antenna coverage for different altitudes). The next section describes the measurement configuration and the demonstration of the 3-D retrieval technique via an OSSE using outputs from a fine-resolution WRF NWP model.

V. EXPECTED PERFORMANCE OF A THREE-NODE NETWORK OF COMPACT MICROWAVE RADIOMETERS

A. Measurement Configuration

To retrieve the 3-D water vapor field with fine spatial and temporal resolutions, we propose a coordinated remote sensor network with a CMR-H at each network node. Each CMR-H,
mounted atop a precise elevation-over-azimuth positioner, is capable of scanning at a rate of 7°/s in elevation and 25°/s in azimuth. A network of three CMR-Hs in an equilateral triangular configuration with approximately 10-km spacing measures brightness temperatures from which the 3-D water vapor field can be retrieved with a horizontal resolution of 500 m, a vertical resolution of 0.5–1 km, and a temporal resolution of 10–15 min, assuming that each radiometer scans the entire hemisphere above and centered on its location.

The elevation-angle scanning pattern was chosen based on an eigenvalue analysis that excludes any angles resulting in redundant grid cell intersections that provide no additional information on the water vapor density. The result is that each radiometer node will scan at 30° spacing in azimuth (12 angles over 360°), and at each azimuth angle, 10 elevation angles are viewed, from zenith to 30° above the horizon. In the case of the triangular network, each node performs multiple scans of the domain in less than 600 s, the shortest decorrelation time of the atmospheric downwelling emission on the spatial scales of these $T_D$ measurements. This decorrelation time is $1/e$ times the maximum autocorrelation of a long (~3000-s) time series of brightness temperatures measured during REFRACTT’06 for an unstable atmosphere in the presence of rapidly evolving moisture gradients. It provides a maximum duration during which any given radiometer node must complete a scan of its hemispherical coverage volume. If all radiometer nodes in the network complete their volumetric scans within this time period, measurements from all radiometer nodes can be considered to be simultaneous for the purpose of water vapor retrieval.

Fig. 7 shows the optimal topology of a network with three CMR-Hs at the vertices of an equilateral triangle with 10-km nearest neighbor spacing. The line segments represent the azimuth angles viewed by each radiometer using the proposed azimuthal scanning pattern, which was determined using the OSSE described in the next section. Retrievals at each azimuth angle are combined to obtain the retrieved 3-D water vapor field.

### B. OSSE

An OSSE was performed in order to evaluate the capability of a network of scanning microwave radiometers to retrieve the 3-D distribution of water vapor in the troposphere. In addition, the results of this OSSE were used to determine the optimal azimuthal scanning strategy for retrieval of the 3-D structure of water vapor with typical spatial and temporal resolutions required to forecast a convective event. To accomplish this, the 3-D water vapor output from a fine-resolution WRF NWP model was compared with retrievals from synthetic brightness temperatures, i.e., those that would have been measured under the same weather conditions by a remote sensor network of three CMR-Hs. The OSSE was performed using the WRF model output for a cold front and deep convection in northwest Indiana (40.7° N, 86° W) from 2:00 UTC to 3:00 UTC. For this OSSE, the a priori water vapor field was the WRF model output at 2:00 UTC. Assuming the weather conditions of the WRF model output at 3:00 UTC, the forward radiative transfer model described in Section IV was used to calculate synthetic brightness temperatures at the CMR-H frequencies as a function of azimuth and elevation angles.

Next, 3-D moisture fields were retrieved using the algebraic tomographic reconstruction method described in Section IV and compared with the WRF model output. Water vapor densities at the unsampled locations were estimated by using the kriging spatial interpolation technique. This algorithm was based on the spatial characteristics of water vapor densities, including the semivariogram and correlation lengths, as explained in Section III, using the fine-resolution WRF model output.

Fig. 8(a) shows the WRF model output of the water vapor density at 3.4-km AGL over northwest Indiana at 3:00 UTC. Taking this WRF model output as “truth,” the percentage error of the retrieved water vapor density at 3:00 UTC is shown in Fig. 8(b) and calculated as

$$\rho_v \text{ retrieval error (\%)} = \frac{\text{NWP} \rho_v - \text{retrieved} \rho_v}{\text{NWP} \rho_v} \times 100.$$  \hspace{1cm} (33)

The OSSE results show that the 3-D water vapor density field can be retrieved with an accuracy of better than 15%–20% at all altitudes. A histogram of the retrieval errors is shown in Fig. 9, demonstrating that the errors in retrieval of water vapor density are roughly uniformly distributed from 5% to 20%. The OSSE retrieval accuracy can be considered to be “worst case” in the sense that the a priori field is 1 or 2 h prior to the retrieval; whereas in a real measurement, one can update the a priori
estimates every 10 min due to the availability of brightness temperature measurements.

C. Retrieval Sensitivity to a priori

For the retrieval in Fig. 8(b), the a priori water vapor density was the output of the fine-resolution WRF model 1 h prior to the retrieval. In order to test the sensitivity of the retrieval algorithm to the quality of the a priori estimate, a profile at a single location was instead used to provide a horizontally homogeneous a priori water vapor density. This case is analogous to using a radiosonde profile at a single location to provide a homogeneous a priori water vapor at each level of the 3-D retrieval. The OSSE was performed using two a priori profiles from the following: 1) one vertex of the triangle formed by the radiometer network [0 km east and 0 km north—bottom left corner in Fig. 8(a)] and 2) the median point of the same triangle. Figs. 10 and 11 show the percentage retrieval errors for the 3-D water vapor field retrieved at 3:00 UTC using a vertical profile at one vertex of the triangle at 2:00 UTC and a vertical profile at the median of the triangle at 2:00 UTC, respectively, as the a priori profile. As expected, the quality of the retrieval depends on that of the a priori. The maximum errors for these retrievals were about 35% for the triangle vertex profile and about 22% for the triangle median point profile. It should be noted that, in both cases for the majority of pixels, the errors are still below 15%–20%. As expected, the retrieval error using the a priori profile from the middle of the triangle was lower than that using the a priori profile at one of the vertices.

VI. FIELD MEASUREMENTS USING A THREE-NODE NETWORK OF COMPACT MICROWAVE RADIOMETERS

Two field experiments were performed as a first demonstration of the capability of ART to retrieve the 2-D and 3-D water vapor fields from radiometer network observations with multiple radiometers measuring overlapping atmospheric volumes. In the first field experiment using multiple CMR-Hs to perform scanning measurements, two CMR-H radiometers were deployed at 6-km spacing near Fort Collins, CO, on October 9, 2007. A radiosonde was launched at 6:00 UTC from the CMR-H1 location. Fig. 12 shows a comparison of the water vapor profile measured by the radiosonde and that retrieved from the brightness temperatures measured by the CMR-H1 radiometer. At 8:00 UTC, CMR-H1 and CMR-H2 performed 2-D scanning measurements in the vertical plane containing the two radiometers. The water vapor profile measured by the RAOB launched 2 h earlier was used as the a priori water vapor profile to retrieve the 2-D water vapor image using the overlapping scans of the two CMR-Hs. A time series of 2-D water vapor images was retrieved in the region between the two
Fig. 13. Two-dimensional water vapor image retrieved in the region between two CMR-H radiometers at 6-km spacing. Each pixel shown has dimensions of 500 m $\times$ 500 m.

Fig. 14. Map of the demonstration network of three CMR-H radiometers deployed at the ARM-SGP site near Billings, OK. The three azimuth angles scanned by each radiometer are shown as dashed line segments. CMR-H2 was deployed at the ARM-SGP Central Facility.

TABLE III
RADIOMETER DEPLOYMENT LOCATIONS IN OKLAHOMA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Radiometer</th>
<th>Latitude</th>
<th>Longitude</th>
<th>Altitude (m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CMR-H1</td>
<td>36.6513° N</td>
<td>97.5670° W</td>
<td>305.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMR-H2</td>
<td>36.6054° N</td>
<td>97.4857° W</td>
<td>325.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMR-H3</td>
<td>36.5782° N</td>
<td>97.5836° W</td>
<td>334.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

radiometers, one example of which is shown in Fig. 13, with a pixel size of 500 m $\times$ 500 m.

The second field experiment consisted of measurements using three ground-based microwave radiometers deployed in a roughly equilateral triangle at the ARM-SGP site in Billings, OK, on August 25–31, 2008. The locations of the three radiometers are shown in Fig. 14, in which the CMR-H2 site is located at the ARM-SGP Central Facility. Table III provides the latitudes and longitudes of the three radiometer locations at the ARM-SGP site. A scanning strategy was chosen as described in Section V, in which each radiometer scans three angles in azimuth (roughly 30° apart) and 10 angles in elevation from zenith to 30° above the horizon. The azimuthal angles for the three-radiometer network are shown as dashed line segments in Fig. 14. The measured brightness temperatures from each of the three radiometers in the demonstration network were used to retrieve the 3-D water vapor field using algebraic tomographic reconstruction, as described in Section IV.

Fig. 15 shows a CMR-H radiometer, a positioner, and a calibration target deployed at one of the three sites near Billings, OK. Images of retrieved water vapor density at 2-km AGL in grams per cubic meter near the ARM-SGP Central Facility, retrieved from brightness temperature measurements at 17:30 UTC on August 31, 2008, are shown in Figs. 16–18, respectively. The pixel size in each of these images is 500 m $\times$ 500 m. The dynamic ranges or horizontal variabilities of water vapor in each of these images are 12%, 13%, and 15%, respectively. The water vapor profile measured by the radiosonde launched at 11:27 UTC was used as the horizontally homogeneous a priori for the first retrieval at 16:00 UTC, similar to the cases described in Section V-C. The a priori for retrieval of water vapor densities at subsequent times uses Kalman filtering and is updated sequentially from the previous retrieval. These retrieved images clearly demonstrate the capability of a remote sensor network of three CMR-H radiometers to measure the vertical and horizontal variations of water vapor density.
The quality of the water vapor density in each individual pixel of better with a grid resolution of 0.5 km, yielding a retrieval accuracy of the water vapor density in each individual pixel of better than 15%–20%. The sensitivity of this retrieval technique to the quality of the a priori was tested by using a horizontally homogeneous a priori profile from model output at a vertex and from model output at the median point of the triangular network.

In order to demonstrate the new 3-D retrieval technique and to obtain high spatial and temporal resolution water vapor fields, a ground-based demonstration network of three radiometers was deployed at the ARM-SGP site in Oklahoma. This network demonstrated the first retrieval of the 3-D water vapor field in the troposphere at fine spatial and temporal resolutions. Complementary measurements from other sensors are needed to perform comparisons and validate retrievals of the 3-D water vapor field obtained from the three-station radiometer network.

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**REFERENCES**


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