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Germanium Fet's Point the Way to Lower Noise Preamplifiers

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### Publication Date

1967-05-01

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UCRL-17593  
Summary

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GERMANIUM FET's POINT THE WAY  
TO LOWER NOISE PREAMPLIFIERS

Emanuel Elad and Michiyuki Nakamura

May 29, 1967

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
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Berkeley, California

AEC Contract No. W-7405-eng-48

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SUMMARY

A novel low-noise preamplifier for use with semiconductor radiation detectors is described. The preamplifier utilizes the low-noise characteristics of a cooled germanium junction field-effect transistor (JFET).

Preamplifiers based on silicon JFET' s are currently used in most high-resolution spectrometers. <sup>1, 2</sup> The advantages of the germanium FET over its silicon counterpart are closely related to the properties of the two materials at cryogenic temperatures. Germanium has inherently higher mobility than silicon; lattice scattering in germanium is the dominant scattering mechanism down to liquid helium temperatures, therefore the optimum mobility of germanium is much higher than that of silicon and is attained at much lower temperatures. Also, due to lower ionization energies of impurities in germanium, the density of free carriers in this material at low temperatures is higher than that in silicon. These two factors combine in germanium FET' s to give high transconductance ( $g_m$ ) at very low temperatures.

It is well known that the main noise source of JFET' s is the thermal noise of the channel. Thus it could have been expected that

lowering the temperature would result in reduced noise of the device.

The described preamplifier employs germanium FET's operated at 4.2°K to attain their high-gain, low-noise characteristics. The input stage consists of two p-channel JFET's type TIXM12 or TIX301 in cascode. The  $g_m$  of these transistors at liquid helium temperature is around 25 000  $\mu$ mhos, and the input resistance is in the region of  $10^{10}$  to  $10^{11}$  ohm. Input capacitance is approximately 20 pF. The rest of the preamplifier is a conventional type of amplifier using bipolar transistors, which has been described elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

Pulse-generator resolution of the preamplifier for zero external capacitance is 0.3 keV FWHM (Ge) with a slope of 0.018 keV/pF. The very low sensitivity to external capacitance (detector) is a result of the relatively high input capacitance of the FET's, which, on the other hand, prevents the achievement of higher signal-to-noise ratio.

The preamplifier was used with a low-capacitance silicon detector (at 110°K), and the obtained low-energy spectra of <sup>55</sup>Mn and <sup>241</sup>Am are shown in Figs. 1 and 2. The  $K_\alpha$  and  $K_\beta$  lines of <sup>55</sup>Mn, only 0.6 keV apart, are resolved and measured with 0.37 keV resolution. The spectrum of <sup>241</sup>Am shows the fine structure of this source; some of the very weak lines ( $L_\eta$ ,  $L_{\beta_6}$ ,  $L_{\gamma_4}$ ) are resolved from the background noise. The  $L_\alpha$  line ( $L_{\alpha_1} = 13.96$  keV,  $L_{\alpha_2} = 13.78$  keV) was measured with 0.42 keV resolution, and the  $L_{\gamma_1}$  and  $L_{\gamma_6}$  lines (0.68 keV apart) were resolved. The  $L_{\beta_1}$  and  $L_{\beta_2}$  lines (0.81 keV apart), previously barely resolved,<sup>1</sup> now show a 2:1 peak-to-valley ratio.

We believe that spectra resolutions obtained with the described preamplifier are the best ever published, and can certainly be improved

with the technological progress in fabrication of germanium FET's.

Concluding, we can say that the germanium junction FET has proved to be a very-low-noise device when operated at liquid helium temperature. We believe the same is true for other low-energy gap materials, especially the high-mobility materials as InSb, which may serve as the basis for future low-noise devices.

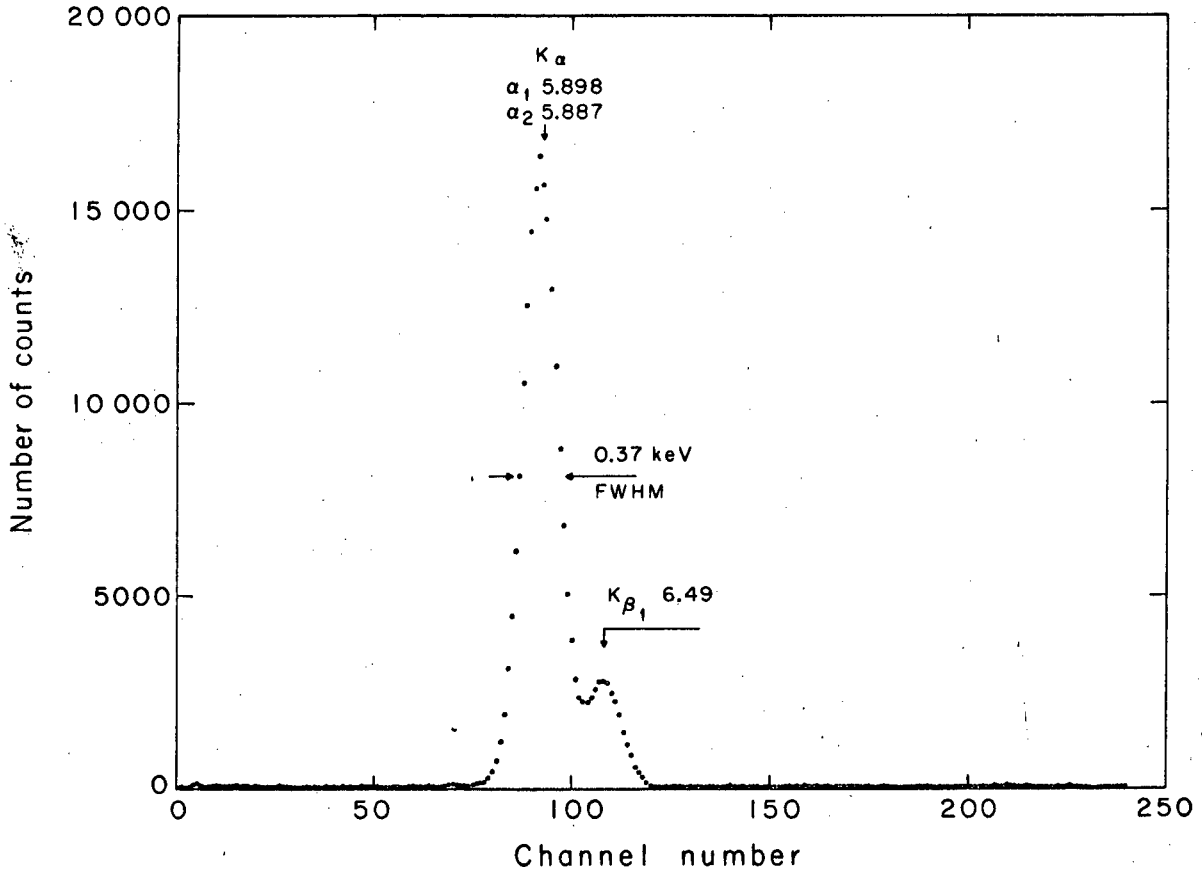
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2. K. F. Smith, J. E. Cline, "A Low-Noise Charge Sensitive Preamplifier for Semiconductor detectors using Paralleled FET's," IEEE, Tran. on NS-13, No. 3, p. 468-476, (June 1966), Tenth Scintillation and Semiconductor Counter Symposium, Washington, D. C., 1966.

#### FIGURE CAPTIONS

Fig. 1. Spectrum of  $^{55}\text{Mn}$  x rays. Energy in keV.

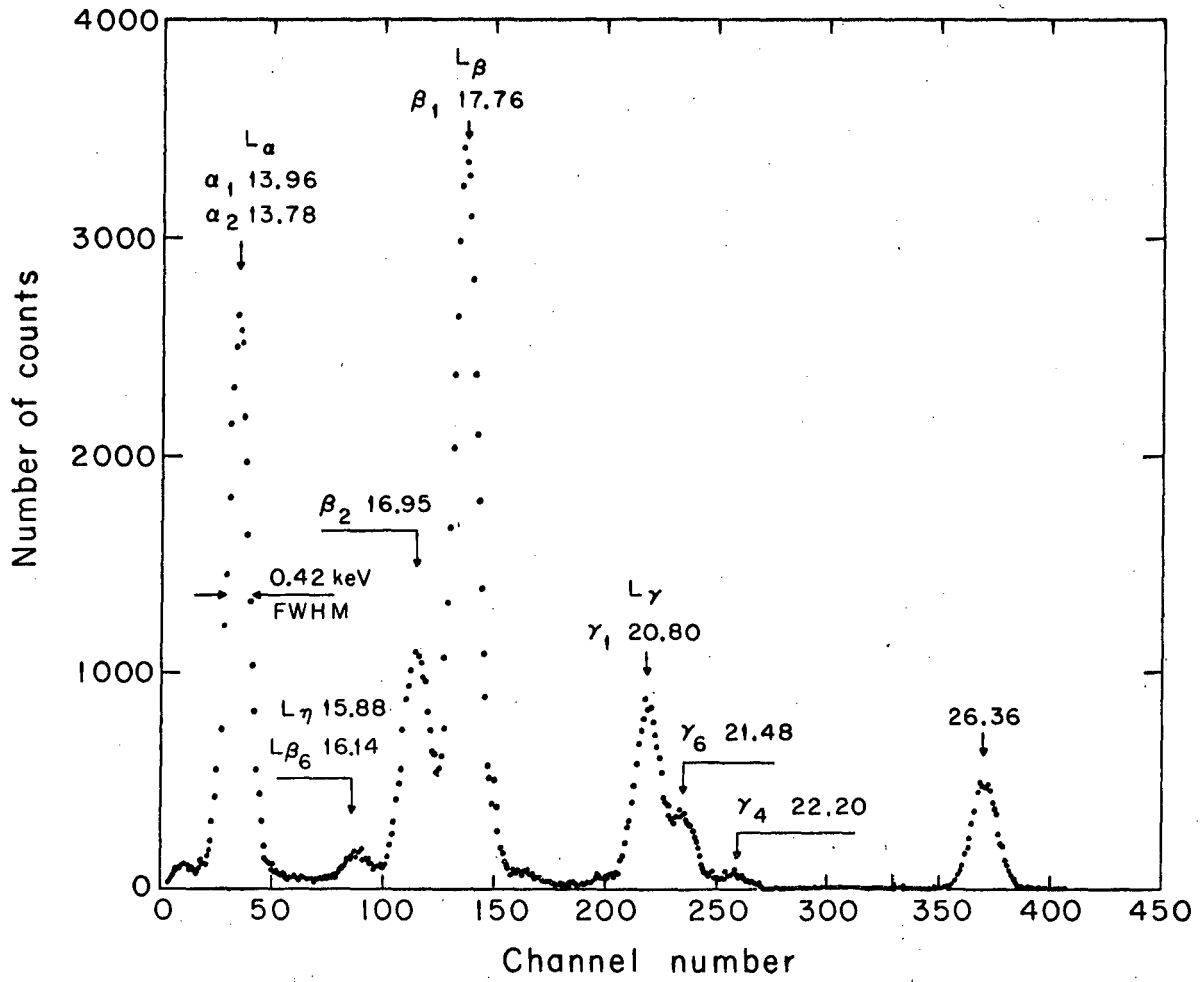
Fig. 2. Spectrum of  $^{241}\text{Am}$  x rays. Energy in keV.



XBL676-3227

Fig. 1





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Fig. 2

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