

Search for nuclei containing two strange quarks

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This paper discusses a search for nuclei containing two strange quarks performed at Brookhaven National Laboratory. The goals and approach of experiment E885 are reviewed. Preliminary missing mass spectra for a subset of the data are presented, showing sensitivity for Ξ hypernuclei and H particle searches. Existence of an angular correlation between pions in the sequential decay of $\Lambda\Lambda$ hypernuclei is suggested on theoretical grounds.

1. INTRODUCTION

We would like to understand the state of matter that results when a nucleus contains two strange quarks. The terms $\Lambda\Lambda$ and Ξ hypernuclei imply a structure in which the strange quarks are bound within hyperons; however, prior to conclusive discovery and study, it is not certain that this will be the case. The goal of experiments is to find these objects and determine their structure.

$\Lambda\Lambda$ and Ξ hypernuclei are basic to the understanding of the H particle [1], strangelets [2] and strange quark matter [3]. Predictions for these exotic forms of matter containing 3 flavors are based on symmetry, the Pauli principle, and the nature of the color-magnetic interaction.

The H particle is the simplest strangelet. If the H is deeply bound, two Λ particles in a hypernucleus will merge to form it. In any case, the presence of the H, even as an unbound resonance, will alter the structure of $\Lambda\Lambda$ and Ξ hypernuclei.

Experiments at the Brookhaven Alternating Gradient Synchrotron (AGS) now have available to them beams of K^- two orders of magnitude more intense than used in previous searches [4]. Both AGS E885 [5] which will be the primary focus of this paper and AGS E906 [6], which is discussed in these proceedings by Fukuda, will have integrated fluxes in excess of 10^{12} K^- .

2. EXPERIMENT 885 GOALS AND APPROACH

The primary goals of E885 are to search for:

1. $\Lambda\Lambda$ hypernuclei produced by stopped Ξ^-

$$\Xi^- + {}^{12}\text{C} \rightarrow {}_{\Lambda\Lambda}^{12}\text{B} + n. \quad (1)$$

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2. Directly produced Ξ hypernuclei



3. H particles produced directly or by stopped Ξ^-



For a more detailed discussion of topics 1 and 3 see the papers of Khaustov and of K. Yamamoto elsewhere in these proceedings.

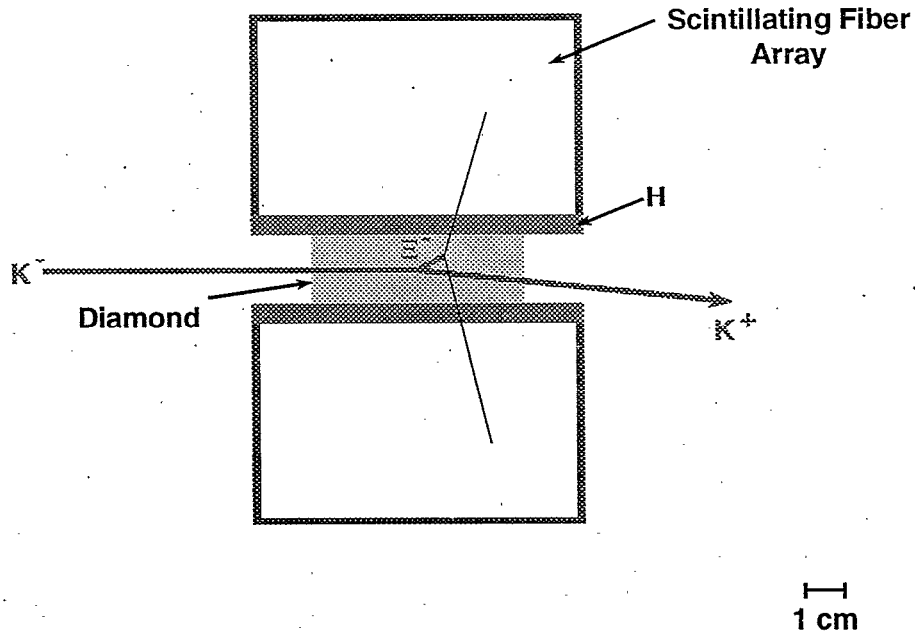


Figure 1. Target region in AGS 885. Ξ^- produced in the reaction $K^- + {}^{12}\text{C} \rightarrow K^+ + \Xi^- + X$ are captured on a second carbon nucleus in the diamond target to produce $\Lambda\Lambda$ hypernuclei. Decay products of the hypernuclei pass through a hodoscope H and are detected in the scintillating fiber arrays.

Two strange quarks can be introduced to the nucleus directly by the (K^-, K^+) reaction. Alternatively, they can be introduced by capture of a Ξ^- produced in the (K^-, K^+) reaction. In E885, both of these processes are studied concurrently.

In the Ξ^- capture case, the Ξ^- must first be brought to rest. It is then captured in an atomic state, making radiative and non-radiative transitions before finally being captured by the nucleus.

When formed on a free proton in the reaction



the Ξ^- is very energetic ($p_{\Xi^-} = 0.5$ GeV/c for $p_{K^-} = 1.8$ GeV/c) and is unlikely to stop in the target. When the reaction takes place on a proton bound in a nucleus, very slow Ξ^- can be produced due to the Fermi motion. The Ξ^- can then be stopped and be captured at rest by another ^{12}C nucleus in the target (reaction 1). A diamond target was used for most of the data taking, since it gives the maximum density and therefore stopping power for a light element. Fig. 1 is a schematic view of the target area. The target is surrounded by a scintillating fiber array to detect the decay products of the double hypernucleus.

Ξ^- which are likely to stop in the target are selected in the analysis by a restriction on the momentum of the K^+ ; this has been studied by a Monte Carlo calculation of quasifree Ξ^- production which has been checked by comparison with KEK emulsion data [7]. Of course, the slowest Ξ^- s correspond to the fastest K^+ s.

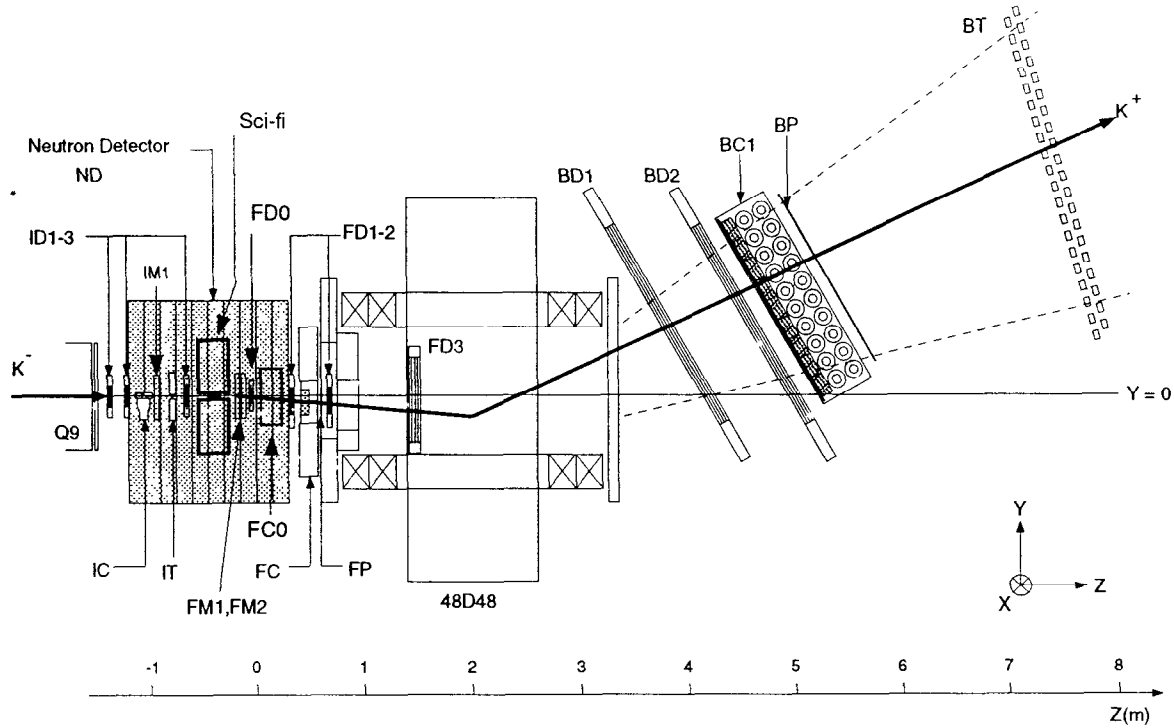


Figure 2. Apparatus of Experiment 885. Drift chambers ID1-3 and gas microstrip chamber IM1 determine the incoming K^- trajectory and are combined with upstream hodoscope data to determine the K^- momentum. Drift chambers FD1-3, BD1,2 and microstrip chambers FM1,2 determine the K^+ momentum from deflection in spectrometer magnet 48D48. Scintillators IT and BT determine K^+ time-of-flight. Hodoscopes FP and BP define the limits of the spectrometer acceptance. Aerogel Cherenkov counters IC1, FC and BC reject pions. High density aerogel counter FC0 rejects protons. Scintillating fiber array Sci-fi and neutron time-of-flight array ND surround the target.

3. EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS

Fig. 2 shows the apparatus. The same beam and spectrometer are also used for the $\Lambda\Lambda$ hypernucleus search E906 discussed by Fukuda in these proceedings. The K^- beam is momentum analyzed using the chambers ID1-3 and a hodoscope and spectrometer not shown in the figure. The beam typically contained one π^- for each K^- with 10^6 K^- in a pulse repeated every 3 seconds.

The diamond target weighs 140 gms and is $5 \times 1 \times 8$ cm in extent. It was fabricated by closely packing $1 \times 1 \times \approx 0.1$ cm blocks of industrial diamond made by a vapor deposition process. A density of $\rho = 3.3$ gm/cm³ was achieved, 93% of the density of single-crystal diamond.

A 48D48 dipole magnet flanked by drift chambers FD0-3 and BD1,2 momentum analyzes the K^+ ($p_{K^+} \approx 1.4$ GeV/c). Suppression of the $\pi^- + p \rightarrow \Sigma^- + K^+$ background requires π^-/K^- discrimination accomplished by using time-of-flight and an aerogel Cherenkov counter IC. Aerogel Cherenkov counters FC and BC distinguish the π^+ from K^+ .

Protons resulting from (K^-, p) elastic and inelastic scattering are the most serious problem at the trigger level. Offline, secondary mass constraints determined from time-of-flight and momentum analysis result in good K^+/p separation. Online, a second level trigger accomplishes roughly same end using a memory lookup table to impose cuts based on an $FD3 \times BT$ momentum matrix and $IT-BT$ time-of-flight. For further trigger level proton rejection, an aerogel Cherenkov counter FC0 selects outgoing K^+ for $p_K > 0.89$ GeV/c and rejects protons with $p_p < 1.84$ GeV/c. It uses a radiator with an index of refraction $n=1.112$ especially fabricated for this experiment; formerly liquid H_2 was the only way to achieve a comparable index. These strategies reduced the trigger rate sufficiently to permit writing most (K^-, K^+) events to tape.

For a subset of events, scintillating fiber data was also recorded. A special level 1 trigger which initiated the readout of the scintillating fiber data included a multiplicity requirement on the hodoscope H (Fig. 1) and an $FP-BT$ matrix to enrich the p_{K^+} region for which the associated Ξ^- is likely to stop.

Missing mass is determined by measurement of p_{K^-} and p_{K^+} ; resolution of 7 MeV FWHM was achieved for thin targets for Ξ^- production on free protons (reaction 5). Resolution for Ξ hypernuclei (reaction 2) is 50% broader due to kinematic effects.

Walls of thick, highly segmented scintillator ND on either side of the target measure neutron energy by time-of-flight; the neutron energy resolution is 1.5 MeV at 15 MeV.

The experiment had an integrated flux of 8×10^{11} K^- on the diamond target. After reduction, 413,000 tagged K^+ events (mainly Ξ) survived.

An additional data set was taken with a CH_2 target $8 \times 2.6 \times 8$ cm in extent. For this target 44,000 tagged K^+ were found in the reduced data.

4. SCINTILLATING FIBER DATA

Scintillating fiber arrays for detecting the decay products of the double hypernucleus are mounted above and below the target as shown in Fig. 1. The arrays are composed of 20,000 1.0 mm fibers in alternate u and v planes viewed by image intensifier tubes (IIT) with a CCD readout. Light output in each fiber is recorded. The scintillating fiber is

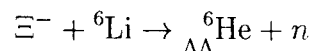
used for study of decay products of hypernuclei and also to help suppress backgrounds.

It may also be possible to observe the sequential two π^- decay of $\Lambda\Lambda$ hypernuclei (experiment E906 [6] will do this with much higher statistics). It should be pointed out that there will be an angular correlation between these two pions [8]. In Λ decay, π^- are emitted preferentially opposite to the Λ spin direction. For a $\Lambda\Lambda$ hypernucleus in the ground state, the Λ particles are in a spin-singlet state. Therefore for the sequential decay mode, the pions are more likely to be emitted in opposite directions.

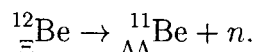
5. $\Lambda\Lambda$ HYPERNUCLEI PRODUCED BY Ξ^- CAPTURE

In reaction 1, Ξ^- capture on carbon results in a $\Lambda\Lambda$ hypernucleus accompanied by a single neutron; the neutron energy measures the binding energy of the ${}_{\Lambda\Lambda}^{12}\text{B}$ hypernucleus.

The branching ratio for production of $\Lambda\Lambda$ hypernuclei accompanied by a single neutron has been calculated in several cases. Zhu and his collaborators [9] have calculated a 5% branching ratio for the reaction



leading to the ${}_{\Lambda\Lambda}^6\text{He}$ ground state. Millener and his collaborators [10] have calculated a 20% branching ratio for



leading to the $p_{\Lambda}s_{\Lambda}$ state of ${}_{\Lambda\Lambda}^{11}\text{Be}$ with the ${}^9\text{Be}$ core in its ground state. This reaction is similar to our signal reaction in that the neutron energy is 12 MeV; the Q value of the reaction is a major determinant of the lambda sticking probability. Calculations in Ref. [11] obtain a considerably smaller value.

6. Ξ HYPERNUCLEI

Except in special cases, Ξ hypernuclear states will have strong interaction widths since a Ξ^- can interact with a proton to form two Λ particles.

However, the release of energy is small and can be further reduced by binding effects when the proton is a component of a nucleus. These factors lead to the conclusion that Ξ hypernuclear states may be narrow. Calculations by Millener [10] and his collaborators, and by Ikeda and his collaborators [12] give ≈ 1.5 MeV for the width of these states. Since this is narrow compared to the spacing between states, a spectroscopy may be possible.

We hope to learn from experiment the binding energy of the Ξ and to deduce the Ξ -nucleus potential, leading to a greater understanding of the baryon-baryon interaction. Strange hadronic matter [13] will exist only if the Ξ -nucleus potential is sufficiently strong.

Seven Ξ hypernuclei candidates reported in emulsion experiments over the period 1959-1969 were analyzed by Dover and Gal in their 1983 review [14]. Typical reported values of Ξ binding energy were between 10 and 20 MeV for p-shell species. Commenting on the quality of the data they said "none of these interpretations is statistically unique, and in some cases the evidence is far from being compelling". However, using these data they determined the Ξ -nucleus central potential to be $V_{0\Xi} \approx 24$ MeV. More recently, a hybrid emulsion experiment found two Ξ hypernucleus events [15]. These events are superior to the older emulsion events because they are initiated by an identified Ξ^-

captured at rest; they are consistent with a Ξ binding energy of less than 4 MeV for the $\Xi^- - {}^{12}\text{C}$ system. However, there are still multiple interpretations possible for these events. Ξ hypernuclei could also be detected by a missing mass experiment. KEK E224 has presented low statistics data [16] possibly suggestive of a potential $V_{0\Xi}$ weaker than 24 MeV.

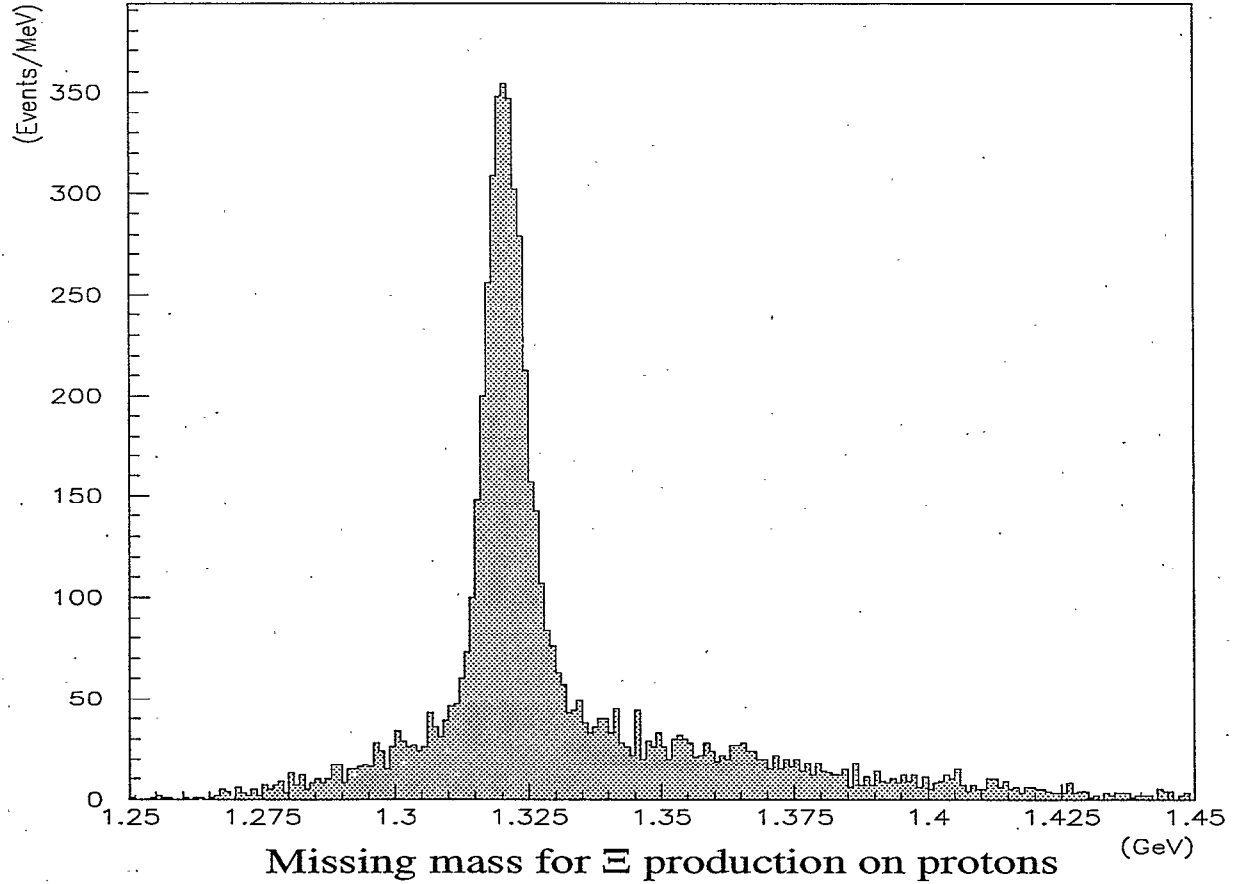


Figure 3. Data taken with the CH_2 (polyethylene) target plotted with hydrogen kinematics. The horizontal scale is missing mass m_X in the reaction $K^- + p \rightarrow X + K^+$. The peak corresponds to Ξ^- production on free protons; the continuum, to production on protons bound in ${}^{12}\text{C}$.

7. ANALYSIS OF THE MISSING MASS SPECTRUM

Analysis of the missing mass spectrum in the reaction $K^- + {}^{12}\text{C} \rightarrow X + K^+$ can be used in a direct search for Ξ hypernuclei and also for H particles. The analysis of this section uses only the data taken with the CH_2 (polyethylene) target by experiment 885; this represents approximately 10% of the total (K^- , K^+) data on carbon. The presence of free protons in this target makes the analysis straightforward. The narrow peak resulting from

Ξ^- production on free protons (Fig. 3) sets the energy scale, determines the resolution and determines the normalization. For this and other reasons [17], the CH_2 data are simpler to analyze than the diamond data.

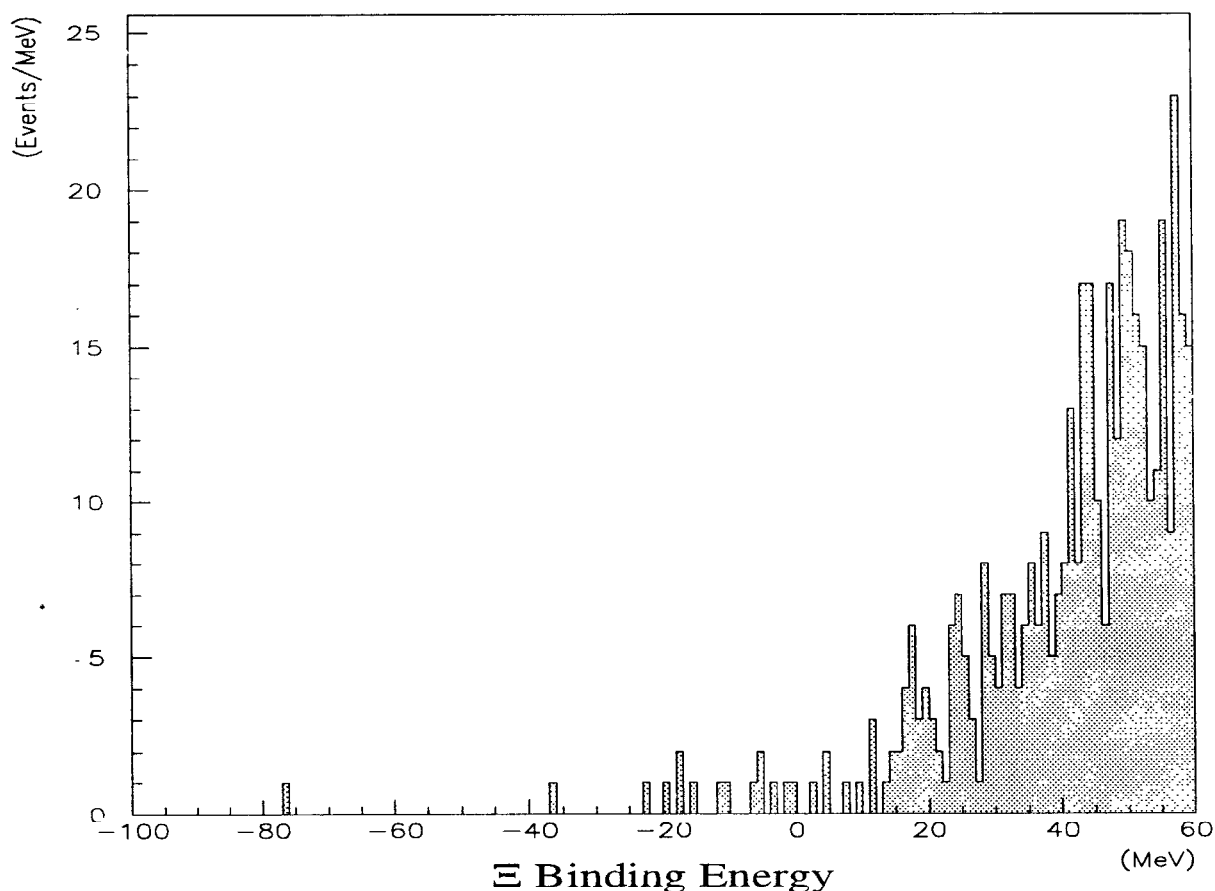


Figure 4. CH_2 target data plotted with carbon kinematics. The horizontal scale is B_Ξ calculated from missing mass in the reaction $K^- + {}^{12}\text{C} \rightarrow X + K^+$. $B_\Xi = 0$ corresponds to a Ξ^- and ${}^{11}\text{B}$ just unbound. If events below zero are Ξ hypernuclei, the species is ${}^{12}_{\Xi}\text{Be}$.

Fig. 4 shows the events plotted versus Ξ binding energy. Zero binding corresponds to production of a Ξ^- and ${}^{11}\text{B}$ system just unbound and is fixed by the position of the hydrogen peak in Fig. 3. Events with B_Ξ between 0 and -25 are candidates for Ξ hypernuclei. The presence of events in this region, and the low background level at more negative values of B_Ξ is intriguing. We are in the process of eliminating possible sources of background and analyzing the large sample of data we have with the diamond target.

The small number of events in the region below -25 MeV indicates that we will also be able to set stringent limits on direct H particle production. Production of an H particle through reaction 3 is expected to result in a peak in the K^+ momentum spectrum [18].

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