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(71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): THE BOEING COMPANY [US/US]; 100 North Riverside Plaza, Chicago, Illinois 60606-2016 (US).

(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): WAUGH, Gregory M. [US/US]; 1613 Morris Avenue South, Renton, Washington 98055 (US). HOLBROOK, Michael Lyle [US/US]; 2910 Kimball Court #9, Port Townsend, Washington 98368 (US). CLEMENTS, Ronald Lawrence [US/US]; 13405 SE 236th Place, Kent, Washington 98042 (US).

(74) Agents: WOO, Euclid et al.; The Boeing Company, PO Box 2515, MC 110-SD54, Seal Beach, California 90740-1515 (US).

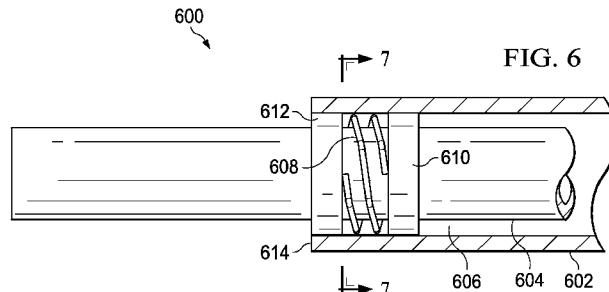
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(54) Title: ELECTROSTATIC BONDING OF COAXIAL TUBING



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(57) Abstract: A method and apparatus for electrostatically bonding coaxial tubing. An outer tube (602) comprises an electrically conductive material and has an inner surface. An inner tube (604) comprises material and has an outer surface. The inner tube (604) and the outer tube (602) are positioned to define a channel (606). A bridging structure (608) comprising an electrically conductive material is positioned such that the bridging structure forms mechanical contact and an electrostatic connection between electrically conductive material on the tubes. The bridging structure is in mechanical contact with the inner surface of the outer tube at a first plurality of points and in mechanical contact with the outer surface of the inner tube at a second plurality of points.

ELECTROSTATIC BONDING OF COAXIAL TUBING

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Field:

The present disclosure relates generally to coaxial tubing used in vehicles, such as 5 aircraft. More particularly, the present disclosure relates to forming an electrostatic connection between the outer tube and the inner tube of coaxial tubing without creating an inconsistency in the tubing surfaces.

2. Background:

Tubing is used to carry various fluids through aircraft and other vehicles. For example, 10 tubing may be used in an aircraft to carry hydraulic fluid that is used by hydraulic systems on the aircraft. As another example, tubing is used in an aircraft to carry fuel between fuel tanks and the aircraft engines. Tubing may be used to carry other fluids on aircraft and other vehicles.

It is desired that the tubing used on aircraft may have various characteristics that improve 15 aircraft performance and safety. For example, using lighter tubing on an aircraft may improve aircraft performance by improving fuel efficiency. Using tubing that is more resistant to undesirable inconsistencies may improve aircraft performance by reducing the need for reworking or replacing tubing with undesirable inconsistencies. Using tubing that is more resistant to undesirable inconsistencies also may improve aircraft safety.

Tubing used on aircraft may be made of materials that provide the desirable 20 characteristics of lighter weight and improved resistance to undesirable inconsistencies. For example, tubing made of titanium provides these desired characteristics. Tubing made of other materials or of various materials in combination also may provide these characteristics.

It also is desirable that tubing on aircraft provides thermal insulation between the fluid 25 carried in the tubing and adjacent structures of the aircraft through which the tubing is run. Such insulation is desirable to reduce heat transfer between the fluid carried in the tubing and the adjacent aircraft structures. Heat transfer between the fluid carried in the tubing and adjacent aircraft structures may affect the fluid, the adjacent structures, or both in undesired ways.

Thermal insulation between the fluid carried in tubing and adjacent aircraft structures 30 may be provided by the use of coaxial tubing. Coaxial tubing includes an inner tube that is surrounded by an outer tube. A fluid, such as hydraulic fluid, fuel, or another fluid, is carried in the inner tube. The outer tube is separated from the inner tube to form a channel between the inner tube and the outer tube. This channel forms a gap between the tubes that may be filled

with a thermally insulating material. For example, the channel between the tubes may be filled with air, another thermally insulating gas, with another thermally insulating fluid, or with other materials.

The use of coaxial tubing on aircraft also may improve aircraft safety. For example, an 5 undesired leak of fluid from the inner tube of the coaxial tube will flow or otherwise be discharged into the channel between the inner tube and the outer tube. The leak of fluid from the inner tube is contained by the outer tube of the coaxial tube in the channel between the tubes. The outer tube of the coaxial tube thus prevents the leak of fluid from the inner tube from reaching other aircraft components, which otherwise might affect operation of the other aircraft 10 components in undesired ways.

The air or other thermally insulating material in the channel between the tubes of a coaxial tube used in an aircraft typically also is electrically insulating. The tubes of the coaxial tube used in the aircraft may be made of an electrically conducting material, such as titanium or another electrically conducting material. In this case, in some operating environments or 15 conditions, an electrical charge or current may form on one or both of the tubes of the coaxial tube. For example, a lightning strike on the aircraft may cause such a build-up of charge or current in the coaxial tube. Since the tubes in the coaxial tube are separated by an electrically insulating channel and charge cannot flow freely between the tubes, this build-up of charge or current may cause an electrical discharge in the form of a spark across the channel between the 20 tubes. Such a discharge is undesirable. For example, any fuel vapor or other combustible material in the channel between the tubes of the coaxial tube may be ignited by a spark across the channel.

Current methods and systems for preventing an electrical discharge across the channel between the tubes of a coaxial tube may not remain fully effective in various conditions or over 25 extended periods of time. Furthermore, current methods and systems for preventing an electrical discharge in a coaxial tube may affect the performance of the tube in undesired ways.

Accordingly, it would be advantageous to have a method and apparatus that takes into account one or more of the issues discussed above, as well as other possible issues.

SUMMARY

30 An advantageous embodiment of the present disclosure provides an apparatus comprising an outer tube, an inner tube, and a bridging structure. The outer tube comprises an electrically conductive material and has an inner surface. The inner tube comprises an electrically

conductive material and has an outer surface. The inner tube is positioned inside the outer tube such that the outer surface of the inner tube and the inner surface of the outer tube define a channel. The bridging structure comprises an electrically conductive material positioned in the channel such that the bridging structure forms mechanical contact and an electrostatic connection 5 between electrically conductive material on the inner surface of the outer tube and electrically conductive material on the outer surface of the inner tube. The bridging structure is in mechanical contact with the inner surface of the outer tube at a plurality of first points. The bridging structure is in mechanical contact with the outer surface of the inner tube at a plurality of second points.

10 Another advantageous embodiment of the present disclosure provides a method for electrically bonding tubing. A bridging structure comprising an electrically conductive material is placed in a channel between an outer tube and an inner tube to form an electrostatic connection between an electrically conductive material on an inner surface of the outer tube and an electrically conductive material on the outer surface of the inner tube. The bridging structure is 15 placed in mechanical contact with the inner surface of the outer tube at a plurality of first points. The bridging structure is in mechanical contact with the outer surface of the inner tube at a plurality of second points.

Another advantageous embodiment provides an apparatus comprising an outer tube, an inner tube, a spring, a first retainer, and a second retainer. The outer tube comprises an 20 electrically conductive material and has an inner surface. The inner tube comprises an electrically conductive material and has an outer surface. The inner tube is positioned inside the outer tube such that the outer surface of the inner tube and the inner surface of the outer tube define a channel. The spring comprises an electrically conductive material positioned in the channel such that the spring forms an electrostatic connection between the electrically 25 conductive material on the inner surface of the outer tube and the electrically conductive material on the outer surface of the inner tube. The spring is in mechanical contact with the inner surface of the outer tube at a plurality of first points. The spring is in mechanical contact with the outer surface of the inner tube at a plurality of second points. The first retainer is positioned in the channel on one side of the spring. The second retainer is positioned in the channel on another 30 side of the spring. The spring is positioned between the first retainer and the second retainer, and the first retainer and the second retainer prevent movement of the spring in the channel.

According to an aspect of the present invention there is provided an apparatus comprising an outer tube comprising an electrically conductive material and having an inner surface, an

inner tube comprising an electrically conductive material and having an outer surface, the inner tube positioned inside the outer tube such that the outer surface of the inner tube and the inner surface of the outer tube define a channel, and a bridging structure comprising an electrically conductive material positioned in the channel such that the bridging structure forms mechanical contact and an electrostatic connection between the electrically conductive material on the inner surface of the outer tube and the electrically conductive material on the outer surface of the inner tube, wherein the bridging structure is in mechanical contact with the inner surface of the outer tube at a plurality of first points and in mechanical contact with the outer surface of the inner tube at a plurality of second points. Advantageously the bridging structure is selected from a group of structures comprising a spring, a mesh, a foam, and a bundle of strands of filaments. Preferably the bridging structure comprises the spring formed by wrapping the electrically conductive material around a mandrel comprising a plurality of sides. Advantageously the apparatus may further comprise a first retainer positioned in the channel on one side of the bridging structure, and a second retainer positioned in the channel on another side of the bridging structure, wherein the bridging structure is positioned between the first retainer and the second retainer and the first retainer and the second retainer prevent movement of the bridging structure in the channel. Advantageously the first retainer and the second retainer are made of an electrically insulating material. Preferably the second retainer is positioned at an end of the outer tube. Advantageously the apparatus is located on an aircraft. Advantageously the bridging structure is made of a material selected from a group of materials consisting of titanium and stainless steel. Advantageously the bridging structure is not attached to the inner surface of the outer tube and the outer surface of the inner tube at any point.

According to an aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for electrically bonding tubing, comprising placing a bridging structure comprising an electrically conductive material in a channel between an outer tube and an inner tube to form an electrostatic connection between an electrically conductive material on an inner surface of the outer tube and an electrically conductive material on an outer surface of the inner tube, wherein the bridging structure is placed in mechanical contact with the inner surface of the outer tube at a plurality of first points and in mechanical contact with the outer surface of the inner tube at a plurality of second points. Advantageously the bridging structure is selected from a group of structures comprising a spring, a mesh, a foam, and a bundle of strands of filaments. Preferably the bridging structure comprises the spring formed by wrapping the electrically conductive material around a mandrel comprising a plurality of sides. Advantageously the method further comprises

placing a first retainer in the channel on one side of the bridging structure, and placing a second retainer in the channel on another side of the bridging structure, wherein the bridging structure is positioned between the first retainer and the second retainer and the first retainer and the second retainer prevent movement of the bridging structure in the channel. Preferably the first retainer and the second retainer are made of an electrically insulating material. Preferably placing the second retainer at an end of the outer tube. Advantageously the bridging structure is made of a material selected from a group of materials consisting of titanium and stainless steel. Advantageously the bridging structure is not attached to the inner surface of the outer tube and the outer surface of the inner tube at any point.

According to an aspect of the present invention there is provided an apparatus comprising an outer tube comprising an electrically conductive material and having an inner surface, an inner tube comprising an electrically conductive material and having an outer surface, the inner tube positioned inside the outer tube such that the outer surface of the inner tube and the inner surface of the outer tube define a channel, a spring comprising an electrically conductive material positioned in the channel such that the spring forms an electrostatic connection between the electrically conductive material on the inner surface of the outer tube and the electrically conductive material on the outer surface of the inner tube, wherein the spring is in mechanical contact with the inner surface of the outer tube at a plurality first of points and in mechanical contact with the outer surface of the inner tube at a plurality second of points, a first retainer positioned in the channel on one side of the spring, and a second retainer positioned in the channel on another side of the spring, wherein the spring is positioned between the first retainer and the second retainer and the first retainer and the second retainer prevent movement of the spring in the channel. Advantageously the spring is formed by wrapping the electrically conductive material around a mandrel comprising a plurality of sides. Advantageously the apparatus is located on an aircraft.

The features, functions, and advantages can be achieved independently in various embodiments of the present disclosure or may be combined in yet other embodiments in which further details can be seen with reference to the following description and drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The novel features believed characteristic of the advantageous embodiments are set forth in the appended claims. The advantageous embodiments, however, as well as a preferred mode of use, further objectives, and advantages thereof will best be understood by reference to the

following detailed description of an advantageous embodiment of the present disclosure when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

Figure 1 is an illustration of an aircraft in accordance with an advantageous embodiment;

Figure 2 is an illustration of a portion of an internal structure of an aircraft in accordance

5 with an advantageous embodiment;

Figure 3 is an illustration of electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing in accordance with an advantageous embodiment;

Figure 4 is an illustration of electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing in accordance with an advantageous embodiment;

10 **Figure 5** is an illustration of a block diagram of a tube assembly in accordance with an advantageous embodiment;

Figure 6 is an illustration of electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing using a spring bridging structure in accordance with an advantageous embodiment;

15 **Figure 7** is an illustration of electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing using a spring bridging structure in accordance with an advantageous embodiment;

Figure 8 is an illustration of a perspective view of electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing using a spring bridging structure in accordance with an advantageous embodiment;

Figure 9 is an illustration of forming a spring bridging structure for electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing in accordance with an advantageous embodiment;

20 **Figure 10** is an illustration of a perspective view of electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing using another bridging structure in accordance with an advantageous embodiment;

Figure 11 is an illustration of a flowchart of a process for electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing in accordance with an advantageous embodiment;

25 **Figure 12** is an illustration of a block diagram of an aerospace vehicle manufacturing and service method in accordance with an advantageous embodiment; and

Figure 13 is an illustration of a block diagram of an aerospace vehicle in which an advantageous embodiment may be implemented.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

30 The different advantageous embodiments recognize and take into account a number of different considerations. “A number”, as used herein with reference to items, means one or more items. For example, “a number of different considerations” means one or more different considerations.

The different advantageous embodiments recognize and take into account that in some applications where the use of a coaxial tube is desirable, it is desirable to provide an electrostatic connection between the inner and outer tubes of the coaxial tube. For example, it is desirable to provide an electrostatic bond between the inner and outer tubes of a coaxial tube in an aircraft to support safe aircraft operation in various electromagnetic operating conditions and environments.

The different advantageous embodiments recognize and take into account that an electrostatic connection between the tubes of a coaxial tube may be made using bonding jumpers. For example, wires may be secured between the inner and outer tubes of a coaxial tube using mechanical clamps and fastener hardware. However, the use of mechanical fasteners and 10 clamps may result in undetectable inconsistencies that may provide sources for electrostatic sparks and ignition of combustible materials in the channel between the tubes.

The different advantageous embodiments also recognize and take into account that an electrostatic connection between the tubes of a coaxial tube may be made by brazing. However, the temperatures required to melt the brazing material is such that it anneals the titanium material 15 of which the tubes may be made. Therefore, brazing may cause inconsistencies in the tubes of the coaxial tube. Such inconsistencies may affect the performance and life of the tubes in undesired ways.

The different advantageous embodiments also recognize and take into account that an electrostatic connection between the tubes of a coaxial tube may be made by welding. However, 20 the welding operation may impart inconsistencies in the tubes. Such inconsistencies may affect the performance and life of the coaxial tube in undesired ways.

The different advantageous embodiments also recognize and take into account that an electrostatic connection between the tubes of a coaxial tube may be made by roller swaging. However, this possible solution requires the development of new tooling and processes. 25 Furthermore, this process has some known issues that may limit the life and functional capabilities of the coaxial tubes.

Therefore, one or more of the advantageous embodiments provides a method and apparatus for electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubes without affecting the performance or life of the tubes in an undesired manner. In accordance with an advantageous embodiment, a bridging 30 structure of electrically conductive material is placed in the channel between the inner and outer tubes of a coaxial tube to form an electrostatic connection between the tubes. The bridging material maintains contact with both the inner tube and the outer tube at a plurality of points.

The bridging structure may form and maintain an electrostatic connection between the inner tube and the outer tube without creating any undesired inconsistencies in the tubes.

Turning now to **Figure 1**, an illustration of an aircraft is depicted in accordance with an advantageous embodiment. Aircraft **100** is an example of a vehicle in which a method and apparatus for electrostatic bonding in accordance with an advantageous embodiment may be implemented. In this advantageous embodiment, aircraft **100** has wings **102** and **104** attached to body **106**. Aircraft **100** includes wing-mounted engine **108**, wing-mounted engine **110**, and tail **112**.

Aircraft **100** also includes internal structures **114**. For example, internal structures **114** may provide structural support for wings **102** and **104** and wing-mounted engines **108** and **110**. Internal structures **114** also may form fuel tanks or other structures for aircraft **100**.

With reference now to **Figure 2**, an illustration of a portion of an internal structure of an aircraft is depicted in accordance with an advantageous embodiment. In this example, a portion of the internal structure of wing **200** is depicted in accordance with an advantageous embodiment. Wing **200** is an example of wing **104** in **Figure 1**.

Coaxial tube **202** may be used to carry fluid through the internal structure of wing **200** or through the internal structure of another portion of an aircraft. For example, without limitation, coaxial tube **202** may be used to carry hydraulic fluid, fuel, or another fluid through wing **200**.

Coaxial tube **202** includes outer tube **204** and inner tube **206**. Inner tube **206** carries the hydraulic fluid, fuel, or other fluid through wing **200**. Inner tube **206** is placed inside outer tube **204**. Inner tube **206** is separated from outer tube **204** to form channel **208** between inner tube **206** and outer tube **204**. Channel **208** provides thermal insulation between inner tube **206** and outer tube **204**. For example, channel **208** may contain a thermally insulating gas or other material, such as air or another thermally insulating material. Channel **208** also provides electrical separation between inner tube **206** and outer tube **204**.

Outer tube **204** may surround inner tube **206** along the entire length of inner tube **206**. Alternatively, as illustrated, outer tube **204** may surround a portion of inner tube **206**. For example, without limitation, outer tube **204** may surround a portion of inner tube **206** where inner tube **206** passes through or near structure **210** in wing **200**. For example, without limitation, structure **210** may be a fuel tank or other structure in wing **200**.

In any case, where outer tube **204** surrounds a portion of inner tube **206**, outer tube **204** may have ends **212** and **214**. In this case, inner tube **206** extends from outer tube **204** beyond ends **212** and **214** of outer tube **204**.

Turning now to **Figure 3**, an illustration of electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing is depicted in accordance with an advantageous embodiment. In this example, coaxial tube **300** is an example of one implementation of coaxial tube **202** in **Figure 2**.

Coaxial tube **300** includes outer tube **302** and inner tube **304**. Inner tube **304** is positioned inside of outer tube **302**. Inner tube **304** is separated from outer tube **302** to form channel **306** between inner tube **304** and outer tube **302**.

In accordance with an advantageous embodiment, bridging structure **308** is positioned in channel **306** such that bridging structure **308** forms an electrostatic connection between outer tube **302** and inner tube **304**. Bridging structure **308** is made of an electrically conducting material and may have a variety of forms.

Bridging structure **308** is in mechanical contact with outer tube **302** at a plurality of points and is in mechanical contact with inner tube **304** at a plurality of points. Bridging structure **308** may or may not be attached to outer tube **302** or to inner tube **304** at any point. The size and shape of bridging structure **308** may be selected so that bridging structure **308** maintains mechanical contact with outer tube **302** and inner tube **304** without requiring that bridging structure **308** be attached to outer tube **302** or to inner tube **304**. The size and shape of bridging structure **308** also may be selected so that bridging structure **308** may be positioned and retained in coaxial tube **300** without causing inconsistencies in outer tube **302** and inner tube **304** during placement of bridging structure **308** in coaxial tube **300** or over the time that bridging structure **308** is maintained in coaxial tube **300**.

First retainer **310** may be positioned in channel **306** on one side of bridging structure **308**. Second retainer **312** may be positioned in channel **306** on another side of bridging structure **308**. Therefore, bridging structure **308** is positioned between first retainer **310** and second retainer **312** in channel **306**. First retainer **310** and second retainer **312** are configured to prevent movement of bridging structure **308** in channel **306**. Preferably, first retainer **310** and second retainer **312** may be held in position in channel **306** in any appropriate manner that does not cause inconsistencies in outer tube **302** or inner tube **304**. For example, without limitation, first retainer **310** and second retainer **312** may be held in position in channel **306** by a mechanical interference fit between each of first retainer **310** and second retainer **312** and outer tube **302** and inner tube **304**. Alternatively, first retainer **310** and second retainer **312** may be held in position in channel **306** using an appropriate adhesive.

In accordance with an advantageous example, first retainer **310**, bridging structure **308**, and second retainer **312** may be positioned at or near end **314** of outer tube **302**. In particular,

second retainer **312** may be positioned at end **314** of outer tube **302**. Inner tube **304** extends from end **314** of outer tube **302**.

A seal may be placed at end **314** of outer tube **302** adjacent to second retainer **312**. Such a seal may be used to prevent any gas, liquid, or other material in channel **306** from leaking out of end **314** of outer tube **302**. The seal may be formed of any material or combination of materials that is formed to completely block channel **306** at or near end **314** of outer tube **302**. Appropriate material or materials for the seal may be selected based upon the gas, liquid, or other material in channel **306** that is to be contained by the seal. Alternatively or additionally, second retainer **312**, first retainer **310**, or both may be configured to provide such a seal. In this case, second retainer **312**, first retainer **310**, or both may be made of the appropriate material and formed to completely block channel **306** between outer tube **302** and inner tube **304**.

Turning now to **Figure 4**, an illustration of electrostatic bonding of the coaxial tubing in **Figure 3** is depicted as taken along line **4-4** of **Figure 3**. In accordance with an advantageous embodiment, as illustrated, bridging structure **308** preferably extends entirely around channel **306** formed between inner surface **400** of outer tube **302** and outer surface **402** of inner tube **304**. In an alternative embodiment, bridging structure **308** may extend partially around channel **306**.

Turning now to **Figure 5**, an illustration of a block diagram of a tube assembly is depicted in accordance with an advantageous embodiment. Coaxial tube **300** in **Figure 3** and **Figure 4** is an example of one implementation of tube assembly **500** in **Figure 5**.

Tube assembly **500** is an electrostatically bonded tube assembly. Tube assembly **500** may be installed in platform **502** to carry any desired fluid in platform **502**. For example, without limitation, platform **502** may be vehicle **504**, such as aircraft **506**. Alternatively, vehicle **504** may be any other aerospace vehicle that is capable of travelling through the air, through space, or both. As another example, vehicle **504** may be a vehicle for travelling over land or on or beneath water.

Tube assembly **500** includes outer tube **508** and inner tube **510**. Inner tube **510** is positioned inside of outer tube **508**. Inner tube **510** and outer tube **508** may be coaxial tubes **512**. In a case where inner tube **510** and outer tube **508** are coaxial tubes **512**, an axis of inner tube **510** is aligned with an axis of outer tube **508**. Alternatively, the axis of inner tube **510** may not be aligned with the axis of outer tube **508**.

Outer tube **508** may be made of electrically conductive material **514**. For example, without limitation, outer tube **508** may be made of titanium, another electrically conductive material, or of a combination of electrically conductive materials.

Outer tube **508** may be cylindrical **516**. In this case, the cross-section of outer tube **508** perpendicular to the axis of outer tube **508** is circular. Alternatively, the cross-section of outer tube **508** perpendicular to the axis of outer tube **508** may be a shape other than circular. Furthermore, the shape, size, or both the shape and size of the cross-section of outer tube **508** perpendicular to the axis of outer tube **508** may be the same along the length of outer tube **508** or 5 may be different at various points along the length of outer tube **508**.

Inner tube **510** may be made of electrically conductive material **518**. For example, without limitation, inner tube **510** may be made of titanium, another electrically conductive material, or of a combination of electrically conductive materials.

10 Inner tube **510** may be cylindrical **520**. In this case, the cross-section of inner tube **510** perpendicular to the axis of inner tube **510** is circular. Alternatively, the cross-section of inner tube **510** perpendicular to the axis of inner tube **510** may be a shape other than circular. Furthermore, the shape, size, or both the shape and size of the cross-section of inner tube **510** perpendicular to the axis of inner tube **510** may be the same along the length of inner tube **510** or 15 may be different at various points along the length of inner tube **510**.

Outer tube **508** and inner tube **510** are separated by channel **522**. Specifically, channel **522** is defined by inner surface **524** of outer tube **508** and outer surface **526** of inner tube **510**.

In accordance with an advantageous embodiment, bridging structure **528** is positioned in channel **522** to form an electrostatic connection between outer tube **508** and inner tube **510**. 20 Specifically, bridging structure **528** forms an electrostatic connection between electrically conductive material **514** on inner surface **524** of outer tube **508** and electrically conductive material **518** on outer surface **526** of inner tube **510**.

In accordance with an advantageous embodiment, bridging structure **528** is in mechanical contact with inner surface **524** of outer tube **508** at plurality of first points **530** on inner surface **524**. Bridging structure **528** is in mechanical contact with outer surface **526** of inner tube **510** at 25 plurality of second points **532** on outer surface **526**. In accordance with an advantageous embodiment, bridging structure **528** does not cause any inconsistencies in inner surface **524** or in outer surface **526** that might affect the performance or life of tube assembly **500**.

Bridging structure **528** may not be attached to inner surface **524** or outer surface **526** at 30 any point. Alternatively, bridging structure **528** may be attached to inner surface **524** or to outer surface **526**, or to both inner surface **524** and outer surface **526**, at one or more points in any appropriate manner. For example, without limitation, bridging structure **528** may be welded or

adhesively bonded to outer tube **508** to inner tube **510** or to both outer tube **508** and inner tube **510**.

5 Bridging structure **528** is made of electrically conductive material **534**. For example, without limitation, bridging structure **528** may be made of titanium **536**, stainless steel **538**, another electrically conductive material, or a combination of electrically conductive materials.

10 Bridging structure **528** may be implemented in a variety of forms. For example, without limitation, bridging structure **528** may be implemented as bundle of strands of filaments **540**, mesh **542**, foam **544**, spring **546**, or as another structure made of electrically conductive material **534**. For example, bundle of strands of filaments **540** may form a steel wool structure of stainless steel **538** or of another electrically conductive material.

15 The manner in which bridging structure **528** is mounted in channel **522** may depend on the form of bridging structure **528** and the materials from which bridging structure **528** is formed. For example, without limitation, bridging structure **528** may be formed as an electrically conductive chloroprene o-ring. In this case, bridging structure **528** may be retained in channel **522** using an appropriate adhesive that attaches bridging structure **528** to one or both of outer tube **508** and inner tube **510**. As another example, bridging structure **528** may be formed as a screen made of titanium or another electrically conductive material or combination of materials. In this case, bridging structure **528** may be installed in channel **522** with a wet primer, fuel tank sealant, or other sealant material or combination of materials. Outer tube **508** then may be swagged down around inner tube **510** to intermesh bridging structure **528**.

20 As an example, spring **546** may be formed in spring forming apparatus **548**. Spring forming apparatus **548** may include mandrel **550** having plurality of sides **552**. For example, without limitation, mandrel **550** may have six sides. In this case, the cross-sectional shape of mandrel **550** is hexagonal **554**.

25 Spring **546** may be formed by wrapping a length of electrically conductive material **556** around plurality of sides **552** of mandrel **550**. Electrically conductive material **556** for forming spring **546** in this manner may include, without limitation, wire **558**, strip **560** of electrically conductive material **556**, or an elongated piece of electrically conductive material **556** in another form.

30 In accordance with an advantageous embodiment, first retainer **562** may be placed in channel **522** on one side of bridging structure **528**. Second retainer **564** may be placed in channel **522** on another side of bridging structure **528**. Therefore, bridging structure **528** is positioned between first retainer **562** and second retainer **564** in channel **522**. First retainer **562**

and second retainer **564** are configured to prevent movement of bridging structure **528** in channel **522**.

First retainer **562** and second retainer **564** may be made from the same or different conductive or nonconductive material, sealant, or combination of materials. For example, 5 without limitation, first retainer **562** may be made of electrically insulating material **566** and second retainer **564** may be made of electrically insulating material **568**. First retainer **562** and second retainer **564** may be made of any appropriate material and using any appropriate fabrication technique to form structures that may be placed and maintained in channel **522** to prevent movement of bridging structure **528** in channel **522** preferably without causing 10 inconsistencies in outer tube **508** or in inner tube **510**. For example, without limitation, one or both of first retainer **562** and second retainer **564** may be made of a sealant, such as a fuel tank sealant. In this case, the sealant may bond bridging structure **528** to outer tube **508** and inner tube **510**.

In one advantageous embodiment, second retainer **564** may be positioned at end **570** of 15 outer tube **508**. Inner tube **510** may extend from outer tube **508** at end **570** of outer tube **508**.

The illustration of **Figure 5** is not meant to imply physical or architectural limitations to the manner in which different advantageous embodiments may be implemented. Other components in addition to, in place of, or both in addition to and in place of the ones illustrated may be used. Some components may be unnecessary in some advantageous embodiments. 20 Also, the blocks are presented to illustrate some functional components. One or more of these blocks may be combined or divided into different blocks when implemented in different advantageous embodiments.

For example, a seal may be placed at end **570** of outer tube **508** adjacent to second retainer **564**. Alternatively or additionally, second retainer **564**, first retainer **562**, or both may be 25 configured to provide such a seal. Such a seal may be used to prevent any gas, liquid, or other material in channel **522** from leaking out of end **570** of outer tube **508**. For example, such a seal may be used to seal a gas, such as argon gas, or a vacuum in channel **522** to provide thermal insulation for tube assembly **500**.

As another example, bridging structure **528** may seal channel **522** while also providing an 30 electrostatic connection between outer tube **508** and inner tube **510**. For example, without limitation, bridging structure **528** may be formed from a sealant including an additive to make it conductive. As one such example, bridging structure **528** may be made of a fuel tank sealant or

other sealant material with graphite fibers or other materials or combinations of materials added to make bridging structure **528** conductive.

Turning to **Figure 6**, an illustration of electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing using a spring bridging structure is depicted in accordance with an advantageous embodiment. In this 5 example, coaxial tubing **600** is an example of tube assembly **500** in **Figure 5**.

Coaxial tubing **600** includes outer tube **602** and inner tube **604**. Inner tube **604** is positioned inside of outer tube **602**. Inner tube **604** is separated from outer tube **602** to form channel **606** between inner tube **604** and outer tube **602**.

Spring **608** is positioned in channel **606** such that spring **608** forms an electrostatic 10 connection between outer tube **602** and inner tube **604**. Spring **608** is in mechanical contact with outer tube **602** at a plurality of points and is in mechanical contact with inner tube **604** at a plurality of points but is not attached to outer tube **602** or to inner tube **604** at any point.

First retainer **610** is positioned in channel **606** on one side of spring **608**. Second retainer **612** is positioned in channel **606** on another side of spring **608**. Therefore, spring **608** is 15 positioned between first retainer **610** and second retainer **612** in channel **606**. First retainer **610** and second retainer **612** are configured to prevent movement of spring **608** in channel **606**.

In accordance with this advantageous example, first retainer **610**, spring **608**, and second retainer **612** are positioned at or near end **614** of outer tube **602**. In particular, second retainer **612** may be positioned at end **614** of outer tube **602**. Inner tube **604** extends from end **614** of 20 outer tube **602**.

Turning now to **Figure 7**, an illustration of electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing **600** in **Figure 6** using a spring bridging structure is depicted in accordance with an advantageous embodiment as taken along line 7-7 of **Figure 6**.

Turing now to **Figure 8**, an illustration of a perspective view of electrostatic bonding of 25 coaxial tubing **600** in **Figure 6** using a spring bridging structure is depicted in accordance with an advantageous embodiment. In this illustration, outer tube **604** in **Figure 6** is removed to show the positions of spring **608**, first retainer **610**, and second retainer **612** more clearly.

Turning now to **Figure 9**, an illustration of forming a spring bridging structure for 30 electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing is depicted in accordance with an advantageous embodiment. In this example, a spring bridging structure is formed by wrapping elongated electrically conductive material **900** around hexagonal mandrel **902** in the direction indicated by arrow **904**. For example, without limitation, elongated electrically conductive material **900** may be a wire or flattened strip of electrically conductive material.

Turing to **Figure 10**, an illustration of a perspective view of electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing using another bridging structure is depicted in accordance with an advantageous embodiment. In this example, bridging structure **1000** is positioned between first retainer **1002** and second retainer **1004** on inner tube **1006**. First retainer **1002** and second retainer **1004** are 5 configured to prevent movement of bridging structure **1000** along inner tube **1006**. In this illustration, the outer tube that forms a coaxial tube with inner tube **1006** is removed to show the positions of bridging structure **1000**, first retainer **1002**, and second retainer **1004** on inner tube **1006** more clearly.

10 Turning now to **Figure 11**, an illustration of a flowchart of a process for electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing is depicted in accordance with an advantageous embodiment. The process in **Figure 11** may be used, for example, to form tube assembly **500** in **Figure 5**.

15 The process begins by placing a first retainer in the channel between the inner tube and the outer tube of a coaxial tube (operation **1102**). An electrically conductive bridging structure is placed in the channel between the tubes in mechanical contact with the tubes at a plurality of points (operation **1104**). The bridging structure is not attached to the inner tube or to the outer tube at any point. The bridging structure forms an electrostatic connection between the inner and outer tubes. A second retainer is then placed in the channel between the inner and outer tubes of the coaxial tube (operation **1106**), with the process terminating thereafter. The bridging structure is positioned in the channel between the first retainer and the second retainer. The first retainer 20 and the second retainer are configured to prevent the electrically conductive bridging structure from moving in the channel between the tubes.

25 Embodiments of the disclosure may be described in the context of aerospace vehicle manufacturing and service method **1200** as shown in **Figure 12** and aerospace vehicle **1300** as shown in **Figure 13**. Turning first to **Figure 12**, an illustration of a block diagram of an aerospace vehicle manufacturing and service method is depicted in accordance with an advantageous embodiment.

30 During pre-production, aerospace vehicle manufacturing and service method **1200** may include specification and design **1202** of aerospace vehicle **1300** in **Figure 13** and material procurement **1204**. During production, component and subassembly manufacturing **1206** and system integration **1208** of aerospace vehicle **1300** in **Figure 13** takes place. Thereafter, aerospace vehicle **1300** in **Figure 13** may go through certification and delivery **1210** in order to be placed in service **1212**.

While in service **1212** by a customer, aerospace vehicle **1300** in **Figure 13** is scheduled for routine maintenance and service **1214**, which may include modification, reconfiguration, refurbishment, and other maintenance or service. In this example, aerospace vehicle manufacturing and service method **1200** is shown as a method for aerospace vehicles. The 5 different advantageous embodiments may be applied to other types of manufacturing and service methods, including manufacturing and service methods for other types of platforms, including other types of vehicles.

Each of the processes of aerospace vehicle manufacturing and service method **1200** may be performed or carried out by a system integrator, a third party, an operator, or by any 10 combination of such entities. In these examples, the operator may be a customer. For the purposes of this description, a system integrator may include, without limitation, any number of aerospace vehicle manufacturers and major-system subcontractors; a third party may include, without limitation, any number of vendors, subcontractors, and suppliers; and an operator may be a company, a military entity, a service organization, and so on.

15 With reference now to **Figure 13**, an illustration of a block diagram of an aerospace vehicle in which an advantageous embodiment may be implemented is depicted. In this advantageous example, aerospace vehicle **1300** is produced by aerospace vehicle manufacturing and service method **1200** in **Figure 12**. Aerospace vehicle **1300** may include an aircraft, a spacecraft, or any other vehicle for travelling through the air, through space, or is capable of 20 operation in both air and space. Aerospace vehicle **1300** may include airframe **1302** with a plurality of systems **1304** and interior **1306**.

Examples of plurality of systems **1304** include one or more of propulsion system **1308**, 25 electrical system **1310**, hydraulic system **1312**, and environmental system **1314**. Advantageous embodiments may be used to provide electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing in plurality of systems **1304**. For example, without limitation, advantageous embodiments may be used to provide electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing used to carry hydraulic fluid used in hydraulic system **1312**. As another example, advantageous embodiments may be used to provide electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing used to carry fuel for use by engines in propulsion system 30 **1308**. Although an aerospace example is shown, different advantageous embodiments may be applied to other industries, such as the automotive industry.

An apparatus and method embodied herein may be employed during at least one of the stages of aerospace vehicle manufacturing and service method **1200** in **Figure 12**. As used herein, the phrase “at least one of”, when used with a list of items, means that different

combinations of one or more of the listed items may be used and only one of each item in the list may be needed. For example, “at least one of item A, item B, and item C” may include, for example, without limitation, item A, or item A and item B. This example also may include item A, item B, and item C, or item B and item C.

5 In one advantageous example, components or subassemblies produced in component and subassembly manufacturing **1206** in **Figure 12** may be fabricated or manufactured in a manner similar to components or subassemblies produced while aerospace vehicle **1300** is in service **1212** in **Figure 12**.

10 As yet another example, a number of apparatus embodiments, method embodiments, or a combination thereof may be utilized during production stages, such as component and subassembly manufacturing **1206** and system integration **1208** in **Figure 12**. A number of apparatus embodiments, method embodiments, or a combination thereof may be utilized while aerospace vehicle **1300** is in service **1212**, during maintenance and service **1214**, or both.

15 The use of a number of the different advantageous embodiments may substantially expedite the assembly of aerospace vehicle **1300**. Alternatively or additionally, a number of the different advantageous embodiments may reduce the cost of aerospace vehicle **1300**. For example, one or more of the different advantageous embodiments may be used during component and subassembly manufacturing **1206**, during system integration **1208**, or both. The different advantageous embodiments may be used during these parts of aerospace vehicle 20 manufacturing and service method **1200** to provide electrostatic bonding of coaxial tubing without reducing the performance or service life of the tubing.

Further, the different advantageous embodiments also may be implemented while in service **1212**, during maintenance and service **1214**, or both to provide electrostatic bonding for coaxial tubing that may be present in aerospace vehicle **1300**.

25 The description of the different advantageous embodiments has been presented for purposes of illustration and description and is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the embodiments in the form disclosed. Many modifications and variations will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art. Further, different advantageous embodiments may provide different advantages as compared to other advantageous embodiments. The embodiment or embodiments selected are chosen and described in order to best explain the principles of the embodiments, the practical application, and to enable others of ordinary skill in the art to understand the disclosure for various embodiments with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated.

CLAIMS:

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus comprising:

an outer tube (508) comprising an electrically conductive material (514) and having an

5 inner surface (524);

an inner tube (510) comprising an electrically conductive material (518) and having an outer surface (526), the inner tube (510) positioned inside the outer tube (508) such that the outer surface (526) of the inner tube (510) and the inner surface (524) of the outer tube (508) define a channel (522); and

10 a bridging structure (528) comprising an electrically conductive material (514) positioned in the channel (522) such that the bridging structure (528) forms mechanical contact and an electrostatic connection between the electrically conductive material (514) on the inner surface (524) of the outer tube (508) and the electrically conductive material (518) on the outer surface (526) of the inner tube (510), wherein the bridging structure (528) is in mechanical contact with 15 the inner surface (524) of the outer tube (508) at a plurality of first points (530) and in mechanical contact with the outer surface (526) of the inner tube (510) at a plurality of second points (532).

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the bridging structure (528) is selected from a

20 group of structures comprising a spring (546), a mesh (542), a foam (544), and a bundle of strands of filaments (540).

3. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the bridging structure (528) comprises the

spring (546) formed by wrapping the electrically conductive material (514) around a mandrel 25 (550) comprising a plurality of sides (552).

4. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising:

a first retainer (562) positioned in the channel (522) on one side of the bridging structure 30 (528); and

a second retainer (564) positioned in the channel (522) on another side of the bridging structure (528), wherein the bridging structure (528) is positioned between the first retainer (562)

and the second retainer (564) and the first retainer (562) and the second retainer (564) prevent movement of the bridging structure (528) in the channel (522).

5. The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the the second retainer (564) is made of an

5 electrically insulating material (566) and is positioned at an end (570) of the outer tube (508).

6. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the apparatus is located on an aircraft (506).

7. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the bridging structure (528) is not attached to

10 the inner surface (524) of the outer tube (508) and the outer surface (526) of the inner tube (510) at any point.

8. A method for electrically bonding tubing, comprising:

15 placing a bridging structure (528) comprising an electrically conductive material (514) in a channel (522) between an outer tube (508) and an inner tube (510) to form an electrostatic connection between an electrically conductive material (514) on an inner surface (524) of the outer tube (508) and an electrically conductive material (518) on an outer surface (526) of the inner tube (510), wherein the bridging structure (528) is placed in mechanical contact with the inner surface (524) of the outer tube (508) at a plurality of first points (530) and in mechanical 20 contact with the outer surface (526) of the inner tube (510) at a plurality of second points (532) and the bridging structure (528).

9. The method of claim 10, wherein the bridging structure (528) is selected from a

25 group of structures comprising a spring (546), a mesh (542), a foam (544), and a bundle of strands of filaments (540).

10. The method of claim 11, wherein the bridging structure (528) comprises the spring (546) formed by wrapping the electrically conductive material (514) around a mandrel (550) comprising a plurality of sides (552).

30

11. The method of claim 10 further comprising:

placing a first retainer (562) in the channel (522) on one side of the bridging structure (528); and

placing a second retainer (564) in the channel (522) on another side of the bridging structure (528), wherein the bridging structure (528) is positioned between the first retainer (562) and the second retainer (564) and the first retainer (562) and the second retainer (564) prevent movement of the bridging structure (528) in the channel (522).

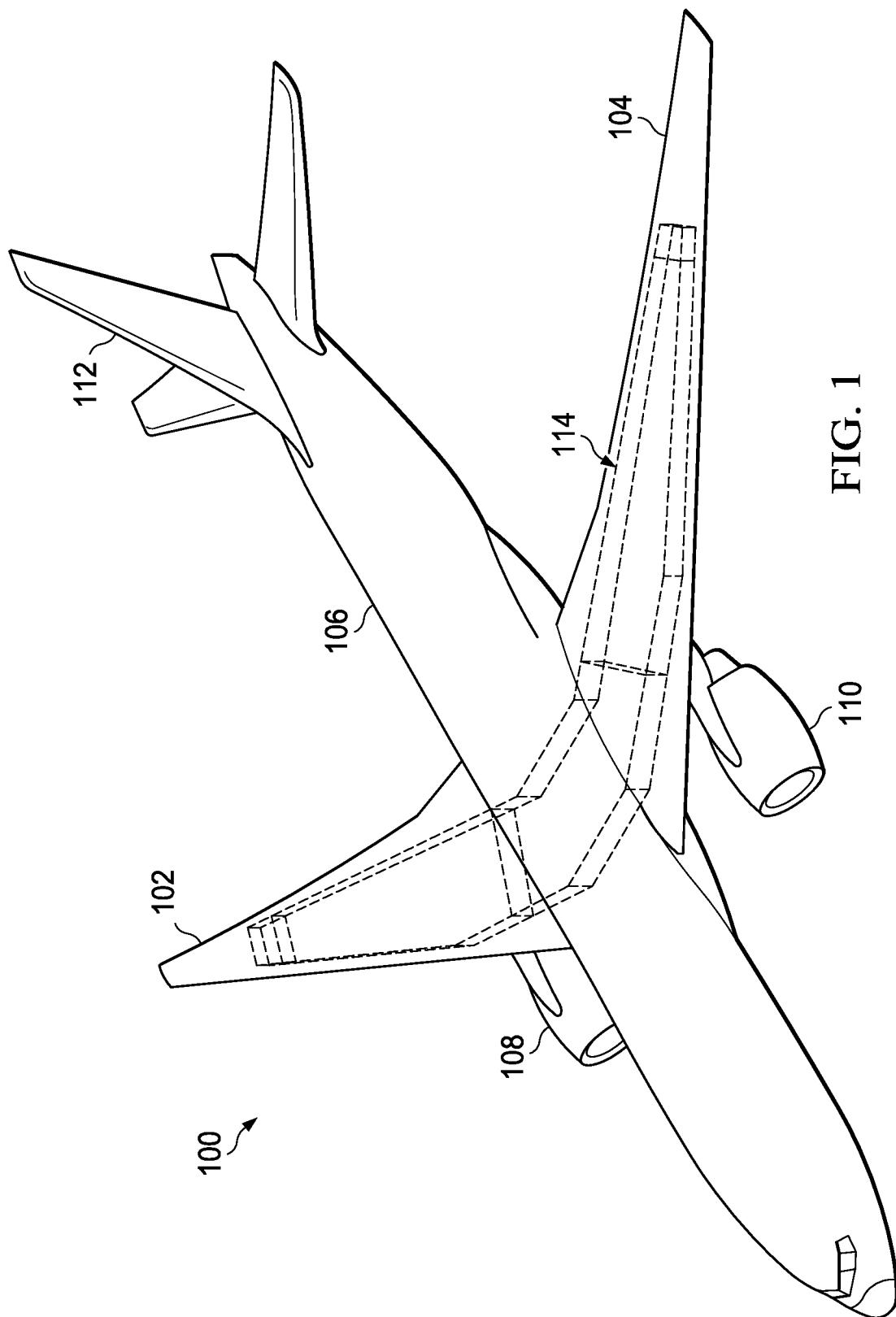
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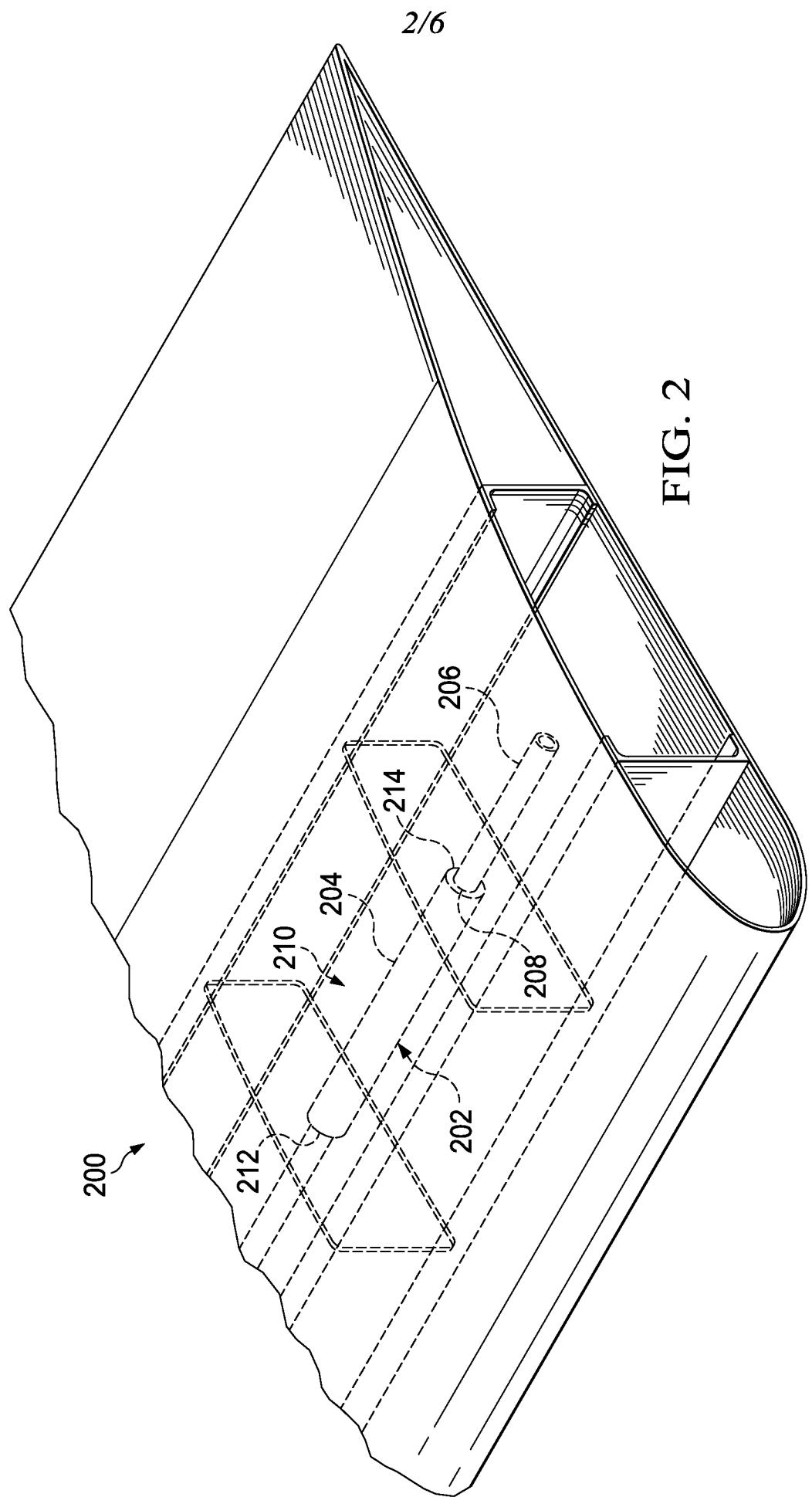
12. The method of claim 13 further comprising placing the second retainer (564) at an end (570) of the outer tube (508).

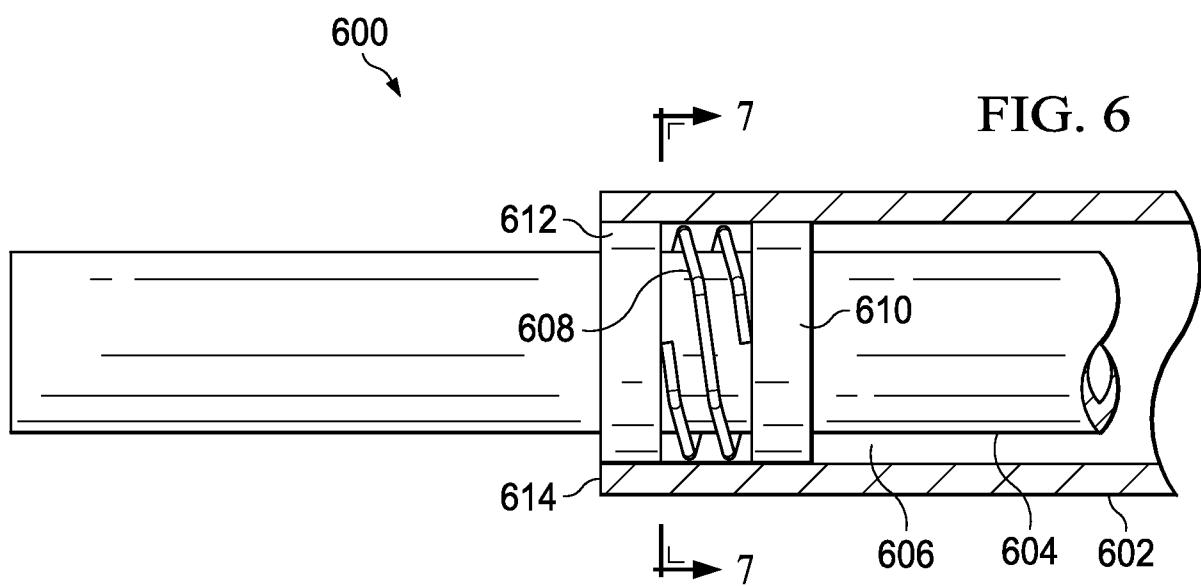
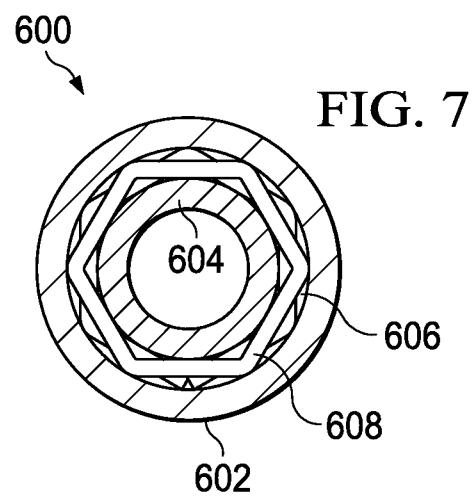
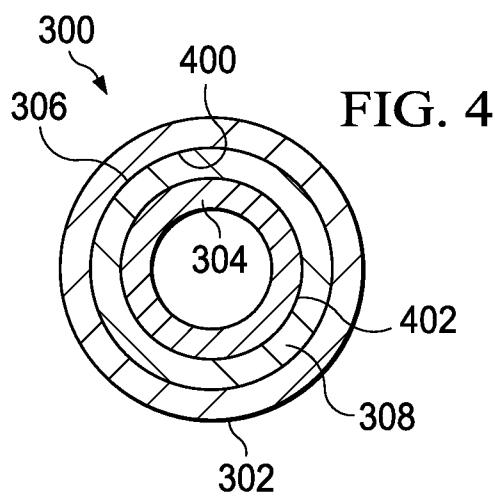
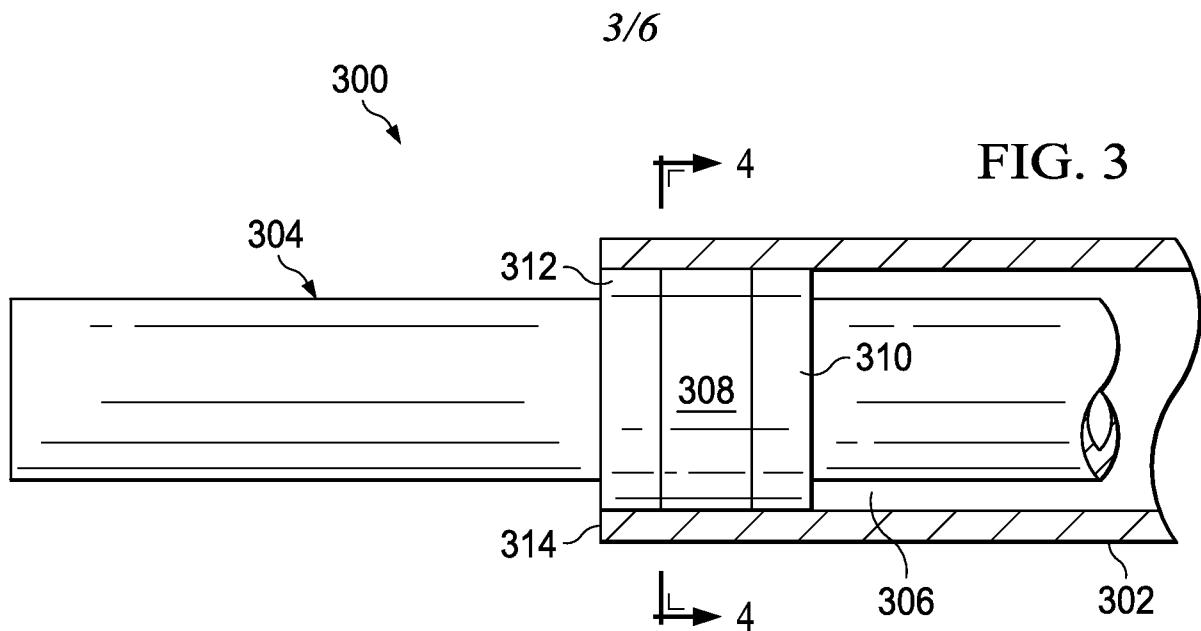
13. The method of claim 10, wherein the bridging structure (528) is made of a material selected from a group of materials consisting of titanium (536) and stainless steel (538).

14. The method of claim 10, wherein the bridging structure (528) is not attached to the inner surface (524) of the outer tube (508) and the outer surface (526) of the inner tube (510) at any point.

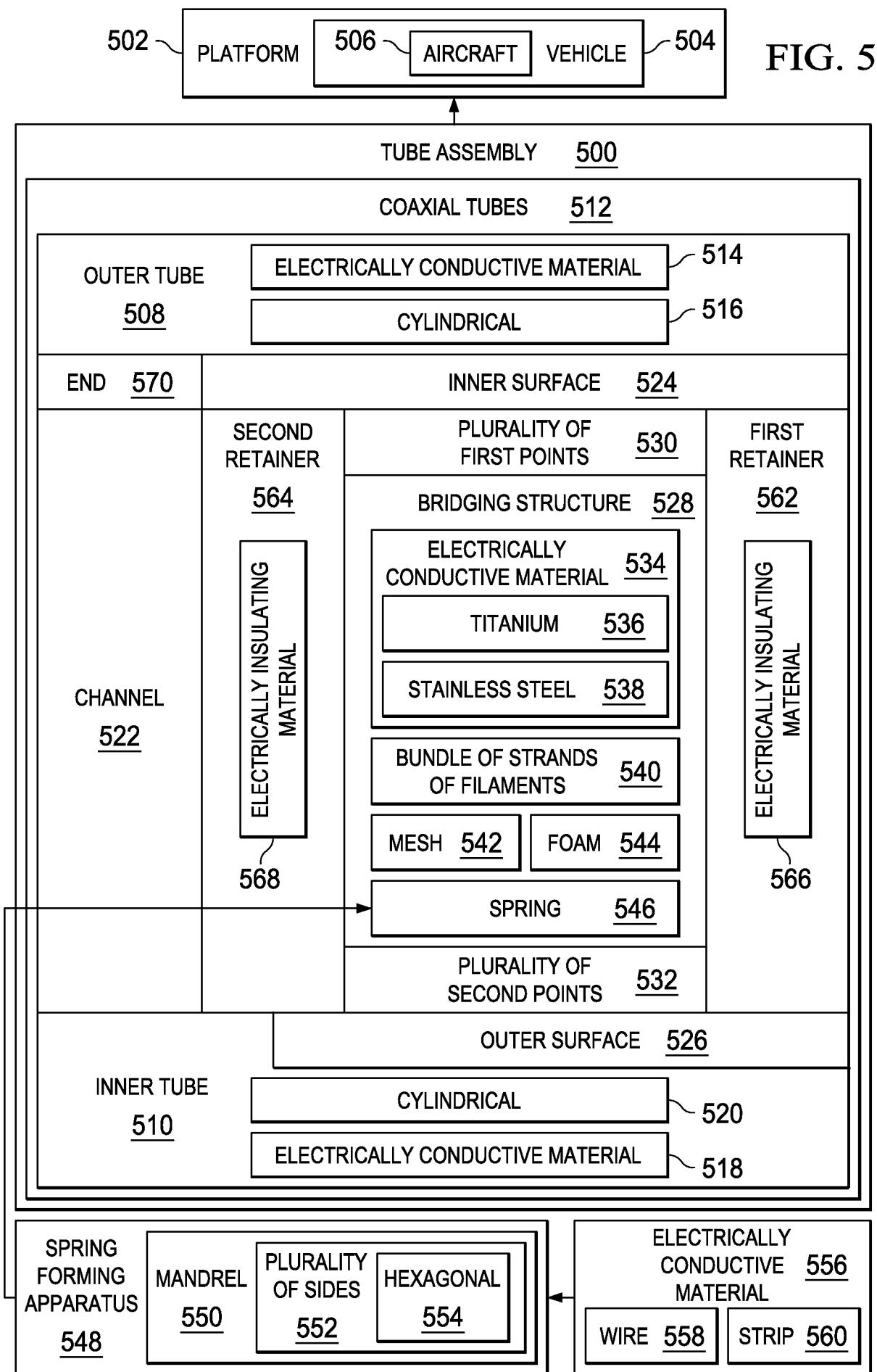
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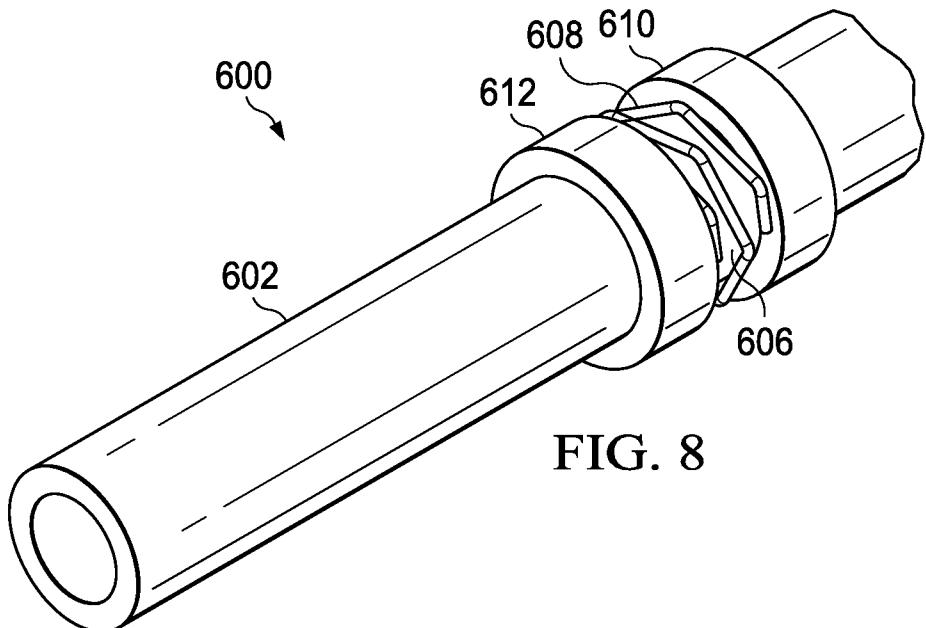


FIG. 8

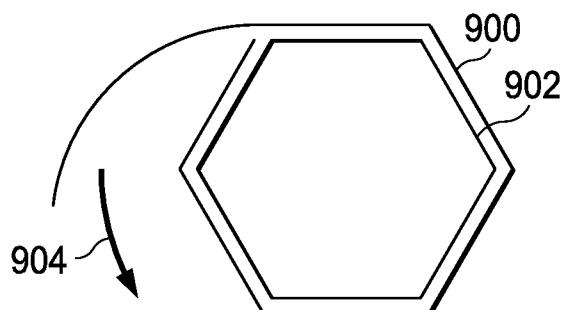


FIG. 9

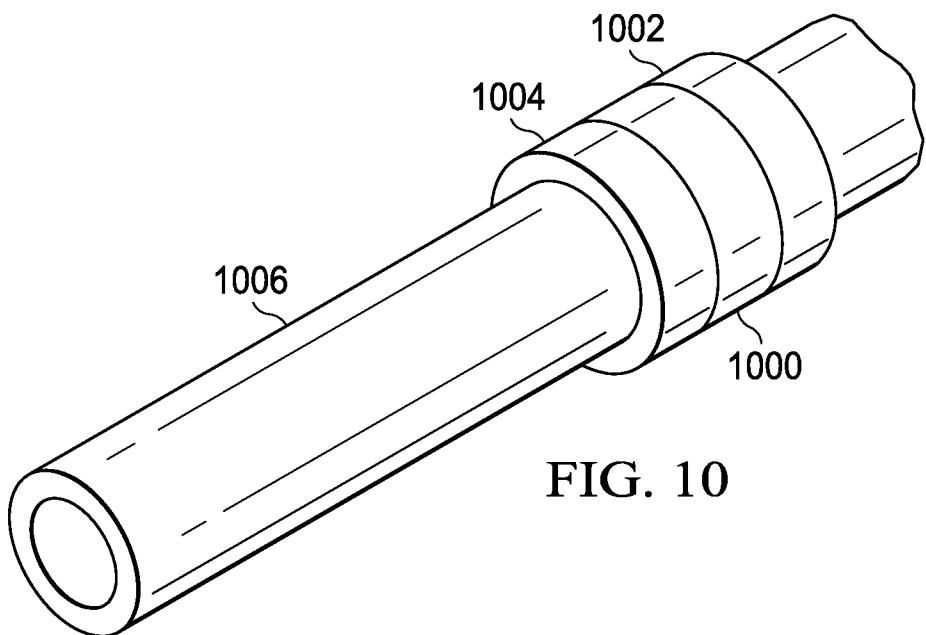


FIG. 10

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FIG. 11

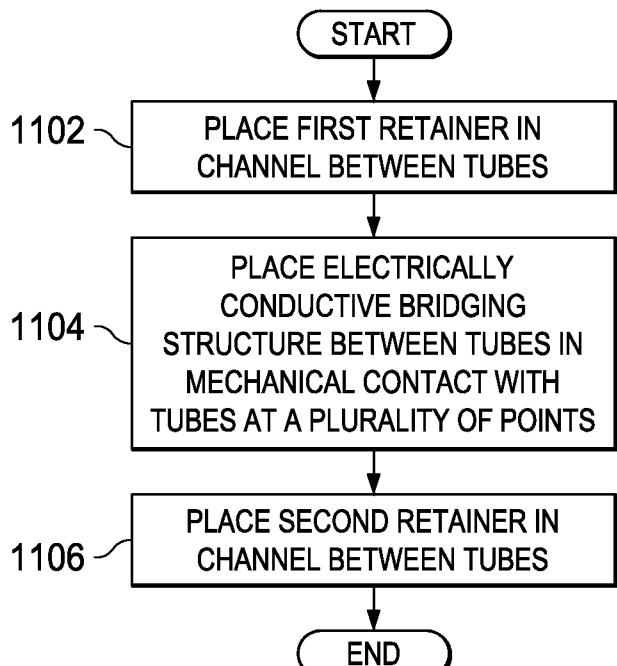
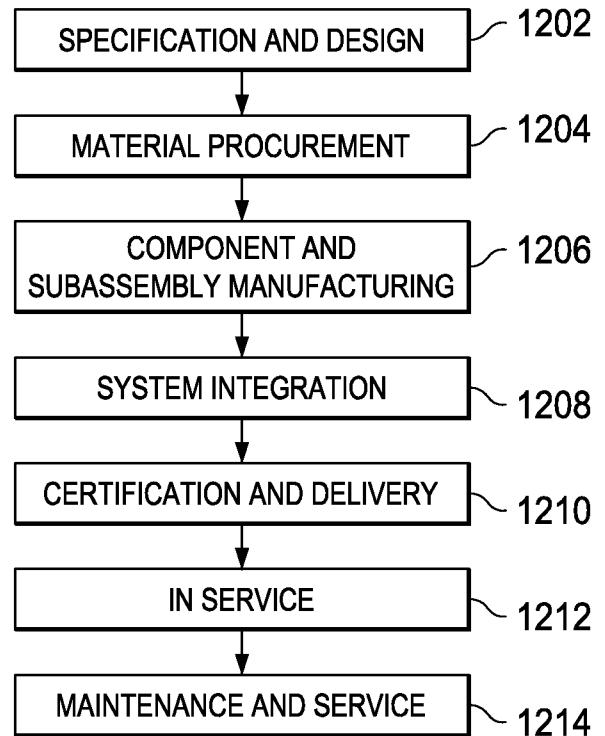
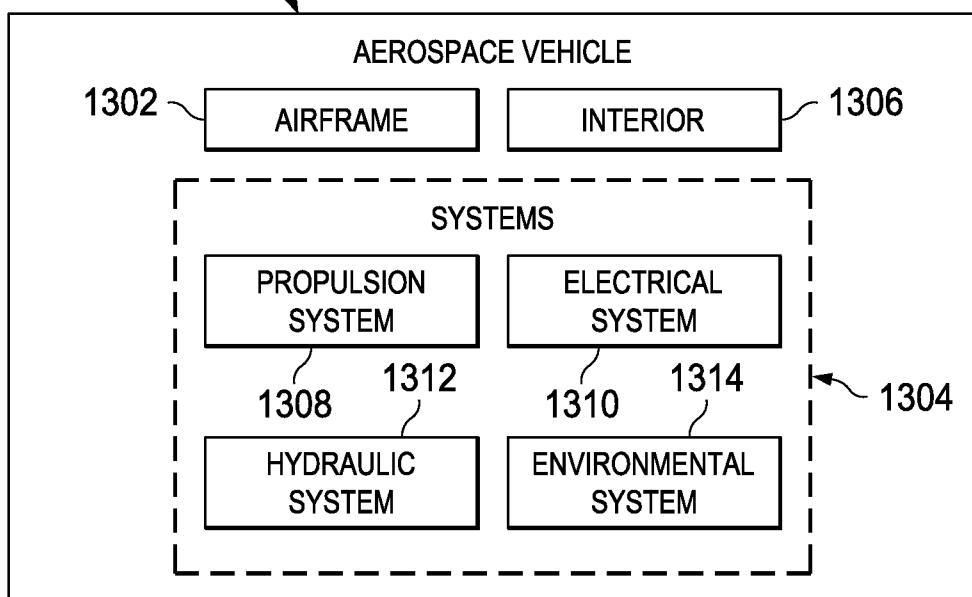


FIG. 12



1300

FIG. 13



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2012/052211

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
INV. F16L7/00 F16L9/18
ADD.

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
F16L

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

EPO-Internal

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X A	FR 1 578 857 A (COMPAGNIE GÉNÉRALE DES EAUX) 22 August 1969 (1969-08-22) page 2, line 4 - page 3, line 19 figures -----	1,2,4-9, 11-14 3,10
X A	US 2 475 635 A (PARSONS ELMER C) 12 July 1949 (1949-07-12) column 2, lines 6-19 figures -----	1,8 2-7,9-14
X A	US 3 440 830 A (WRIGHT NORMAN K ET AL) 29 April 1969 (1969-04-29) column 2, lines 32-44 figures -----	1,8 2-7,9-14



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

Date of mailing of the international search report

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NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040,
Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Durrenberger, Xavier

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

PCT/US2012/052211

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