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Methods and apparatus for operating gas turbine engines

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2003207033 20 Aug 2003

- 11 -

METHODS AND APPARATUS FOR OPERATING GAS TURBINE ENGINES

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

5 A method for operating an aircraft engine facilitates preventing ice accumulation on the aircraft engine. The method comprises coupling a semi-permeable membrane to the engine adjacent an outer surface of the engine, coupling a fluid reservoir to the aircraft engine in flow communication with the semi-permeable membrane, and supplying fluid from the fluid reservoir to the semi-permeable membrane to facilitate preventing ice accumulation on the aircraft engine outer surface.

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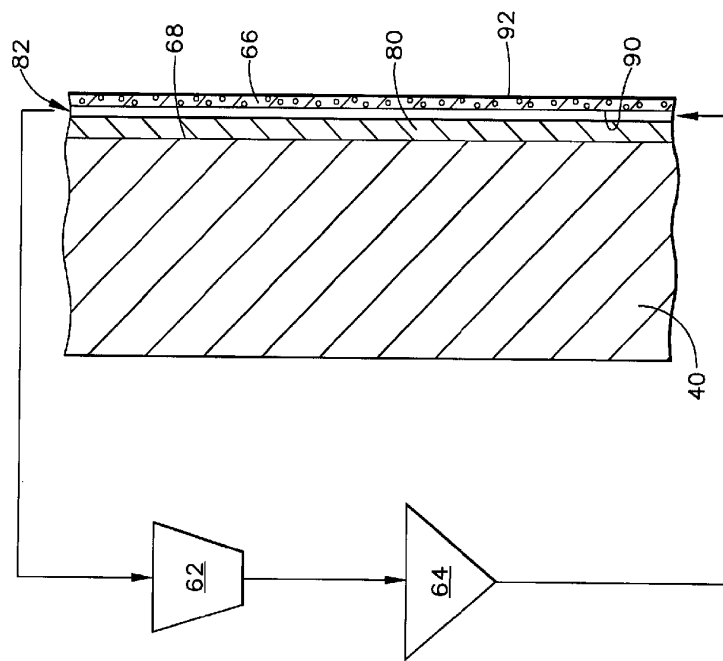


FIG. 2

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**ORIGINAL
COMPLETE SPECIFICATION
STANDARD PATENT**

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Invention Title: Methods and apparatus for operating gas turbine engines

The following statement is a full description of this invention, including the best method of performing it known to me:-

5020

2003207033 20 Aug 2003

- 1 -

METHODS AND APPARATUS FOR OPERATING GAS TURBINE ENGINES

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates generally to gas turbine engines, and more particularly, to methods and apparatus for operating gas turbine engines.

- 5 Gas turbine engines typically include high and low pressure compressors, a combustor, and at least one turbine. The compressors compress air which is mixed with fuel and channeled to the combustor. The mixture is then ignited for generating hot combustion gases, and the combustion gases are channeled to the turbine which extracts energy from the combustion gases for powering the compressor, as well as producing useful work to
10 propel an aircraft in flight or to power a load, such as an electrical generator.

- When engines operate in icing conditions, ice may accumulate on exposed external engine structures. More specifically, if engines are operated within icing conditions at low power for extended periods of time, ice accumulation within the engine and over the exposed engine structures may be significant. Over time, continued operation of the engine, or a
15 throttle burst from lower power operations to higher power operations, may cause the accumulated ice build-up to be ingested by the high pressure compressor. Such a condition, known as an ice shed, may cause the compressor discharge temperature to be suddenly reduced. In response to the sudden decrease in compressor discharge temperature, the corrected core speed increases in the aft stages of the high pressure
20 compressor. This sudden increase in aft stage corrected core speed may adversely impact compressor stall margin.

- To facilitate preventing ice accumulation within the engine and over exposed surfaces adjacent the engine, at least some known engines include a control system that enables the engine to operate with an increased operating temperature and may include sub-systems
25 that direct high temperature bleed air from the engine compressor to the exposed surfaces. However, the increased operating temperature and the bleed systems may decrease engine performance. As such, to further facilitate preventing ice accumulation at least some

2003207033 24 Dec 2009

- 2 -

known engines are sprayed with a deicing solution prior to operation. However, during flight and over time, the effectiveness of the deicing solution may decrease. More specifically, during engine operation, evaporative cooling may still cause freezing and ice accumulation over external engine surfaces, such as a front frame of the engine.

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BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In one aspect of the invention, a method for operating an aircraft engine to facilitate preventing ice accumulation on the aircraft engine is provided. The method comprises coupling a
10 membrane to the engine adjacent an outer surface of the engine, coupling a fluid reservoir to the aircraft engine in flow communication with the membrane, and supplying fluid from the fluid reservoir to the membrane to facilitate preventing ice accumulation on the aircraft engine outer surface.

15 In another aspect, an ice protection system for an aircraft engine including a front frame is provided. The ice protection system is coupled to the aircraft engine and includes semi-permeable membrane and a fluid reservoir. The semi-permeable membrane is in flow communication with the fluid reservoir to facilitate preventing ice formation on the engine front frame.

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In a further aspect of the invention, an aircraft ice protection system is provided. The system is coupled to the aircraft and includes at least one of a semi-permeable membrane and a microporous membrane, and a fluid reservoir coupled in flow communication. The fluid reservoir supplies fluid to at least one of the semi-permeable member and the microporous
25 membrane to facilitate preventing ice formation on an external surface of the aircraft engine.

According to a further aspect the present invention provides a method for operating an aircraft engine to facilitate preventing ice accumulation on the aircraft engine, said method including:

30 coupling a membrane to the engine adjacent an outer surface of the engine;
coupling a spacer to the engine between the outer surface of the engine and the membrane includes positioning the spacer against the outer surface of the engine and

2003207033 25 Jun 2010

- 2A -

coupling the spacer to the membrane such that a gap is defined between the membrane and the spacer;

coupling a fluid reservoir to the aircraft engine in closed-loop flow communication with the membrane; and

supplying fluid from the fluid reservoir to the membrane to facilitate preventing ice accumulation on the aircraft engine outer surface.

According to a further aspect the present invention provides an ice protection system for an aircraft engine including a front frame, said ice protection system coupled against an external surface of the aircraft engine and including a semi-permeable membrane, a distribution spacer, a fluid reservoir, and a pump, said semi-permeable membrane in closed-loop flow communication with said fluid reservoir to facilitate preventing ice formation on the engine front frame, said distribution spacer coupled to the engine between the engine external surface and said semi-permeable membrane, said pump for supplying fluid from said fluid reservoir to said semi-permeable membrane, wherein said semi-permeable membrane is coupled to the engine such that fluid from said fluid reservoir flows from the engine through a gap defined between said engine and said semi-permeable membrane.

According to a further aspect the present invention provides an aircraft ice protection system, said system coupled against an external surface of the aircraft and including a semi-permeable membrane, a distribution spacer, a fluid reservoir, and a pump coupled in closed-loop flow communication, said fluid reservoir for supplying fluid to said semi-permeable membrane to facilitate preventing ice formation on an external surface of the aircraft, said distribution spacer coupled to the external surface of the aircraft between the external surface of the aircraft and said semi-permeable membrane, said pump for supplying fluid from said fluid reservoir to said semi-permeable membrane through a gap defined between said surface and said semi-permeable membrane.

2003207033 25 Jun 2010

- 2B -

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- Figure 1 is schematic illustration of a gas turbine engine; and
- 5 Figure 2 is a schematic illustration of an ice protection system that may be used with the gas turbine engine shown in Figure 1.

2003207033 20 Aug 2003

- 3 -

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Figure 1 is a schematic illustration of a gas turbine engine 10 including a fan assembly 12, a high pressure compressor 14, and a combustor 16. In one embodiment, engine 10 is an F110 engine commercially available from General Electric Company, Cincinnati, Ohio.

- 5 Engine 10 also includes a high pressure turbine 18 and a low pressure turbine 20, all arranged in a serial, axial flow relationship. Fan assembly 12 and turbine 20 are coupled by a first shaft 24, and compressor 14 and turbine 18 are coupled by a second shaft 26.

Engine 10 also includes an annular front frame 40 which supports a bearing (not shown) which, in turn, supports one end of a shaft, such as shaft 24, for allowing rotation thereof.

- 10 A plurality of circumferentially-spaced inlet guide vane assemblies 42 extend between an outer structural case ring (not shown in Figure 1) and a center hub 44 and direct airflow entering engine 10 downstream to compressor 14.

In operation, air flows through inlet guide vane assemblies 42 and through fan assembly 12, such that compressed air is supplied from fan assembly 12 to high pressure compressor

- 15 14. The highly compressed air is delivered to combustor 16. Airflow from combustor 16 drives rotating turbines 18 and 20 and exits gas turbine engine 10. Engine 10 is operable at a range of operating conditions between design operating conditions and off-design operating conditions.

Figure 2 is a schematic illustration of an ice protection system 60 that may be used with a

- 20 gas turbine engine, such as gas turbine engine 10 (shown in Figure 1). In another embodiment, ice protection system 60 is used to facilitate preventing ice accumulation along exposed surfaces (not shown) of an aircraft (not shown), such as, but not limited to, a control surface (not shown). Ice protection system 60 includes a fluid reservoir 62, a fluid pump 64, and a semi-permeable membrane 66. In an alternative embodiment, ice
25 protection system 60 includes a machined microporous membrane rather than semi-permeable membrane 66. Specifically, semi-permeable membrane 66 is coupled to an external surface 68 to facilitate preventing ice accumulation along exposed surfaces such as

2003207033 20 Aug 2003

- 4 -

- surface 68. In the exemplary embodiment, semi-permeable membrane 66 is coupled to a leading edge surface 68 of engine front frame 40 to facilitate preventing ice accumulation against front frame 40. More specifically, semi-permeable membrane 66 is coupled to a distributor or spacer 80 that is coupled to surface 68. Spacer 80 ensures that a flowpath gap 82 is defined between semi-permeable membrane 66 and surface 68.

- Pump 64 and reservoir 62 are coupled in flow communication with each other and with membrane 66 and gap 82, such that system 60 forms a pseudo-closed loop system formed with gap 82 and membrane 66. More specifically, because membrane 66 is semi-permeable, a portion of fluid circulating through system 60 passes through membrane 66 in a wicking process, described in more detail below, and the remaining fluid is recirculated through system 60. In one embodiment, ice protection system 60 is coupled to a processor-based engine control system. The term processor, as used herein, refers to microprocessors, application specific integrated circuits (ASIC), logic circuits, and any other circuit or processor capable of executing system 60 as described herein.
- During operation, fluid is supplied from reservoir 62 by pump 64 to gap 82. The fluid facilitates preventing ice accumulation on surface 68. In one embodiment, the fluid is a glycol or alcohol mixture which combines with water, in a liquid or solid state, that is exposed to either surface 68 or a membrane 66. For example, such a fluid mixture may reduce a freezing point temperature as low as -50°F. More specifically, the fluid is supplied to gap 82 by pump 64 and a portion of the fluid is dispersed from an internal surface 90 of membrane 66 to an external surface 92 of membrane 66. In one embodiment, fluid dispersed onto surface 92, in a process known as freezing point depression, facilitates reducing a freezing point of water in contact with surface 92 to facilitate preventing ice accumulation against surface 68.
- In another embodiment, the fluid dispersion onto surface 92 facilitates reducing a viscosity of surface 68 to facilitate preventing ice accumulation against surface 68. In one embodiment, a hydrocarbon oil fluid mixture is circulated within system 60 to facilitate reducing surface viscosity. Thus, system 60 facilitates enhanced compressor stall margin

2003207033 20 Aug 2003

- 5 -

when the engine is operating in potential icing conditions, and thus facilitates preventing compressor ice shed events. Accordingly, system 60 also facilitates preventing engine 10 from surging following an ice shed ingestion. Furthermore, because the fluid circulating within system 60 is not required to be at an elevated operating temperature, a variety of materials may be used in fabricating system 60.

The above-described ice protection system is cost-effective and highly reliable in facilitating the prevention of ice accumulation along exposed surfaces. Fluid supplied through the system is dispersed through a semi-permeable membrane in a wicking process in a cost-effective manner. Accordingly, because bleed air is not utilized, the ice protection system facilitates preventing ice accumulation without sacrificing engine performance or without requiring expensive inflatable bladders. As a result, the ice control system facilitates enhanced compressor stall margin when the engine is operating in potential icing conditions, and thus eliminates compressor stall margin shortfalls that may occur following a compressor ice shed event, or when a reduced fuel schedule is used with the engine.

While the invention has been described in terms of various specific embodiments, those skilled in the art will recognize that the invention can be practiced with modification within the spirit and scope of the claims.

Throughout this specification and the claims which follow, unless the context requires otherwise, the word "comprise", and variations such as "comprises" or "comprising", will be understood to imply the inclusion of a stated integer or step or group of integers or steps but not the exclusion of any other integer or step or group of integers or steps.

The reference to any prior art in this specification is not, and should not be taken as, an acknowledgement or any form of suggestion that that prior art forms part of the common general knowledge in Australia.

2003207033 20 Aug 2003

- 6 -

PARTS LIST

10	Gas Turbine Engine
12	Fan Assembly
14	High Pressure Compressor
16	Combustor
18	High Pressure Turbine
20	Low Pressure Turbine
24	First Shaft
26	Second Shaft
40	Front Frame
42	Vane Assembly
44	Center Hub
60	Ice Protection System
62	Fluid Reservoir
64	Fluid Pump
66	Membrane
68	External Surface
80	Spacer
82	Flowpath Gap
90	Internal Surface
92	External Surface

25 Jun 2010

2003207033

- 7 -

The claims defining the present invention are as follows:

1. A method for operating an aircraft engine to facilitate preventing ice accumulation on the aircraft engine, said method including:
 - 5 coupling a membrane to the engine adjacent an outer surface of the engine;
 - coupling a spacer to the engine between the outer surface of the engine and the membrane includes positioning the spacer against the outer surface of the engine and coupling the spacer to the membrane such that a gap is defined between the membrane and the spacer;
 - coupling a fluid reservoir to the aircraft engine in closed-loop flow communication with the membrane; and
 - supplying fluid from the fluid reservoir to the membrane to facilitate preventing ice accumulation on the aircraft engine outer surface.
2. A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein supplying fluid from the fluid reservoir
 10 further includes supplying fluid through the gap to the membrane.
3. A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein supplying fluid from the fluid reservoir to the membrane further includes supplying fluid to the membrane to facilitate reducing a freezing point for ice accumulation along the engine outer surface, wherein the membrane
 15 is at least one of a semi-permeable membrane.
4. An ice protection system for an aircraft engine including a front frame, said ice protection system coupled against an external surface of the aircraft engine and including a semi-permeable membrane, a distribution spacer, a fluid reservoir, and a pump, said semi-
 20 permeable membrane in closed-loop flow communication with said fluid reservoir to facilitate preventing ice formation on the engine front frame, said distribution spacer coupled to the engine between the engine external surface and said semi-permeable membrane, said pump for supplying fluid from said fluid reservoir to said semi-permeable membrane, wherein said semi-permeable membrane is coupled to the engine such that fluid
 25 from said fluid reservoir flows from the engine through a gap defined between said engine

25 Jun 2010
2003207033

- 8 -

and said semi-permeable membrane.

5. An ice protection system in accordance with Claim 4 wherein said semi-permeable membrane is coupled to the engine such that fluid from said fluid reservoir flows from the engine through said semi-permeable membrane.
6. An ice protection system in accordance with Claim 4 wherein said fluid reservoir configured to disperse fluid through said semi-permeable membrane to facilitate preventing ice accumulation on the engine.
7. An ice protection system in accordance with Claim 4 further including a pump for supplying fluid from said fluid reservoir to said semi-permeable membrane.
8. An aircraft ice protection system, said system coupled against an external surface of the aircraft and including a semi-permeable membrane, a distribution spacer, a fluid reservoir, and a pump coupled in closed-loop flow communication, said fluid reservoir for supplying fluid to said semi-permeable membrane to facilitate preventing ice formation on an external surface of the aircraft, said distribution spacer coupled to the external surface of the aircraft between the external surface of the aircraft and said semi-permeable membrane, said pump for supplying fluid from said fluid reservoir to said semi-permeable membrane through a gap defined between said surface and said semi-permeable membrane.
9. An aircraft ice protection system in accordance with Claim 8 wherein said distribution spacer is mounted a distance away from said semi-permeable membrane such that a gap is defined between said semi-permeable membrane and said external surface of the aircraft.
10. An aircraft ice protection system in accordance with Claim 9 wherein said fluid reservoir is configured to supply fluid to said semi-permeable membrane through said gap.
11. An aircraft ice protection system in accordance with Claim 9 wherein said fluid reservoir is configured to disperse fluid through said semi-permeable membrane to

2003207033 24 Dec 2009

- 9 -

facilitate preventing ice accumulation on a front frame of an engine coupled to the aircraft.

12. A method for operating an aircraft engine to facilitate preventing ice accumulation on the aircraft engine, substantially as herein described.

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13. An ice protection system for an aircraft engine, substantially as herein described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

14. An aircraft ice protection system, substantially as herein described with reference to
10 the accompanying drawings.

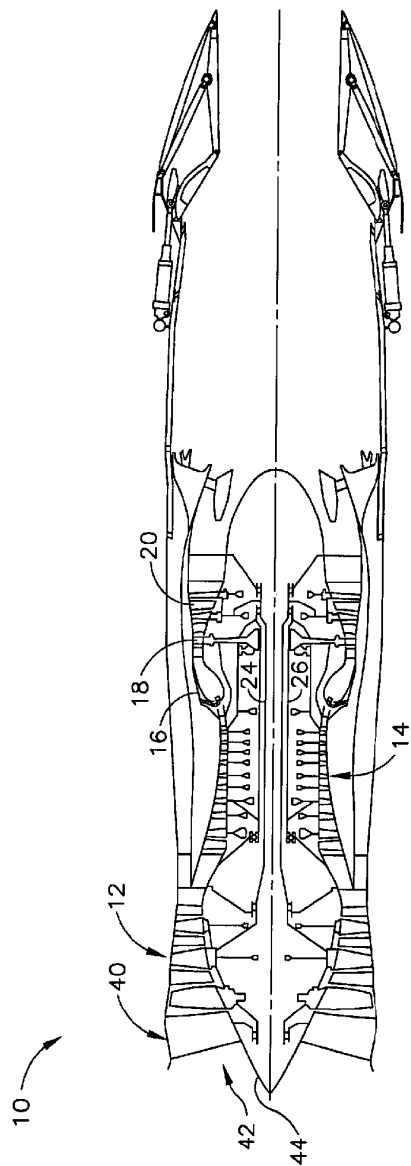


FIG. 1

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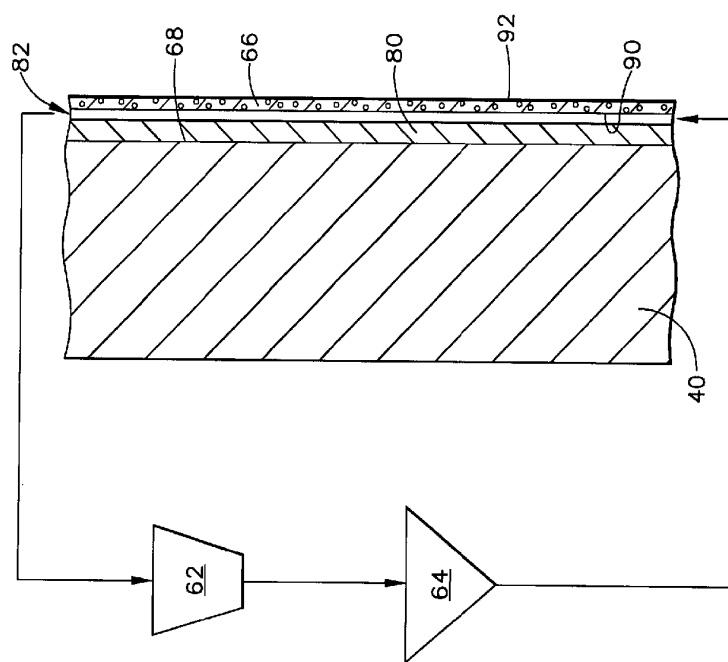


FIG. 2