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(54) Title of Invention

End connector for expandible watch band

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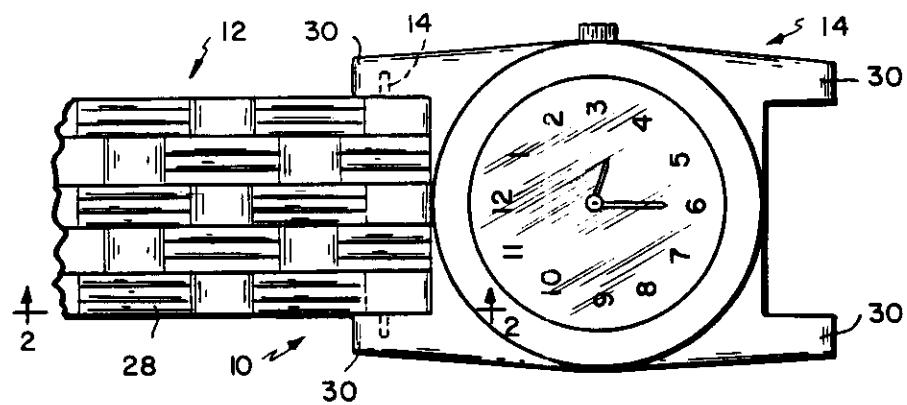


FIG. 1

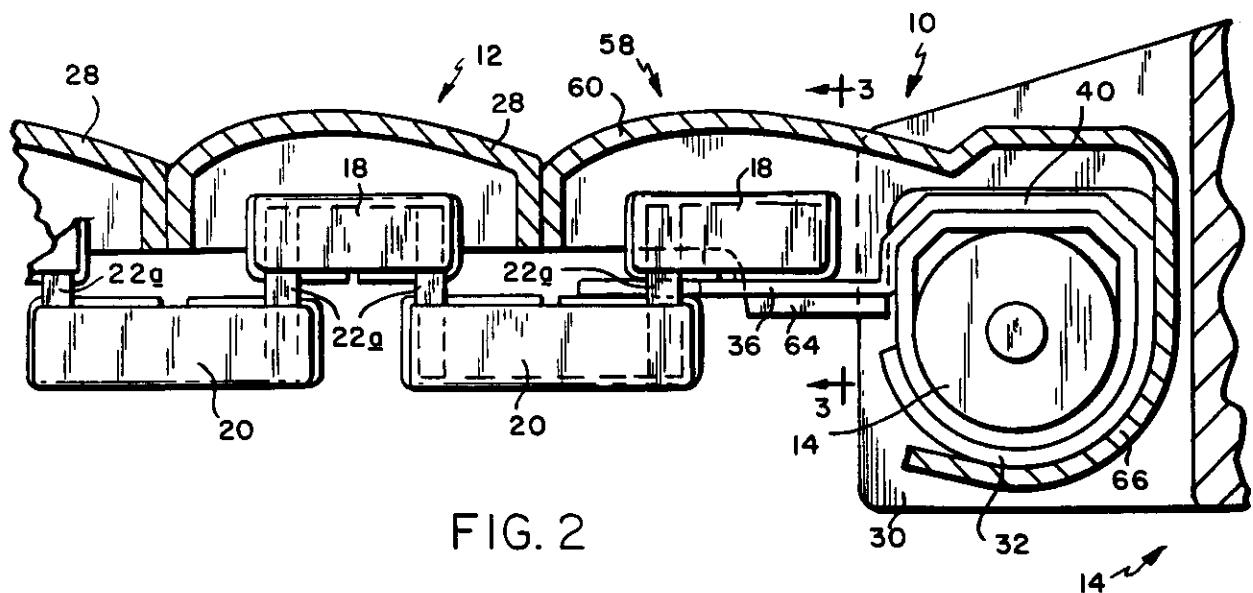


FIG. 2

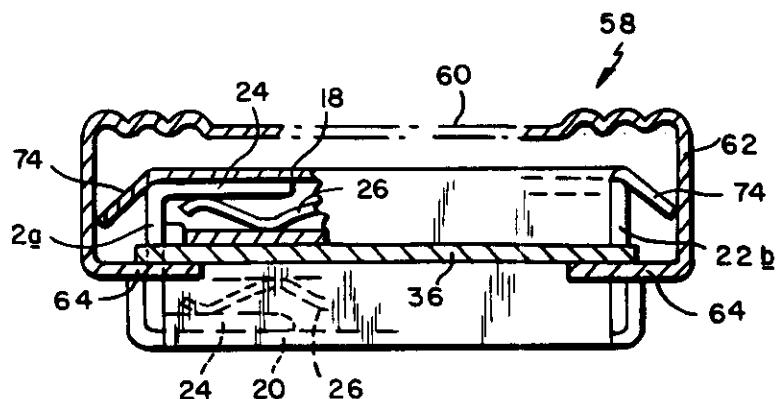


FIG. 3

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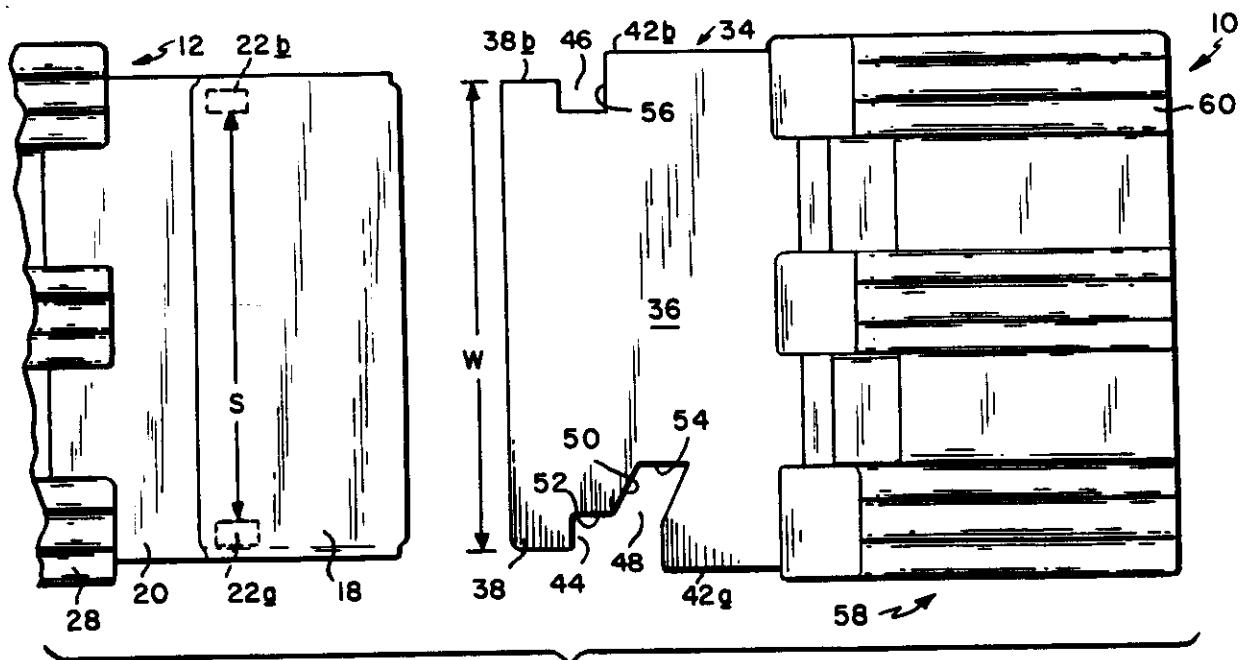


FIG. 4

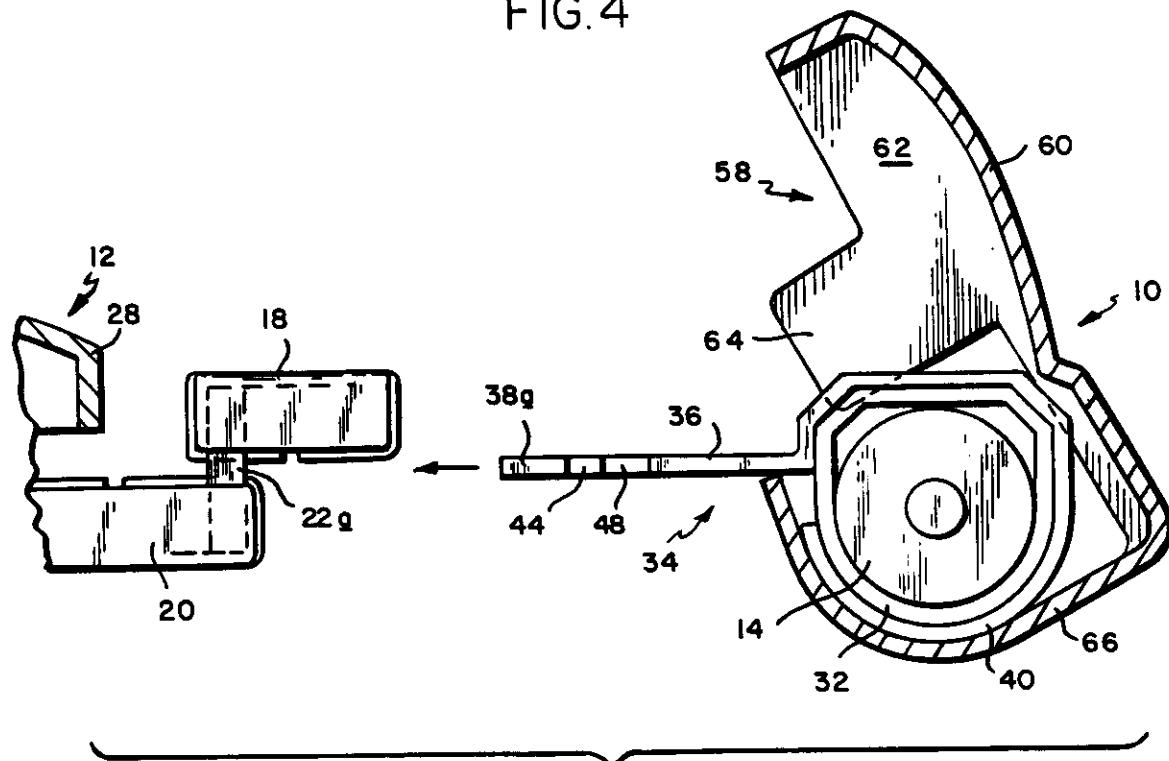


FIG. 5

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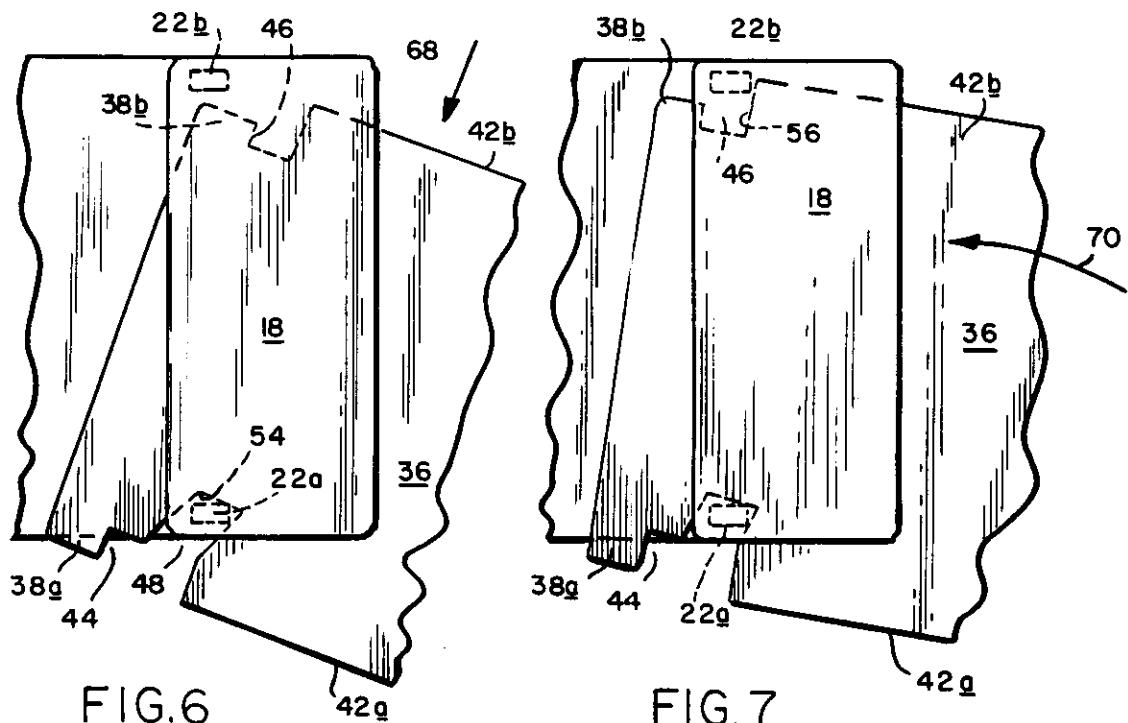


FIG. 6

FIG. 7

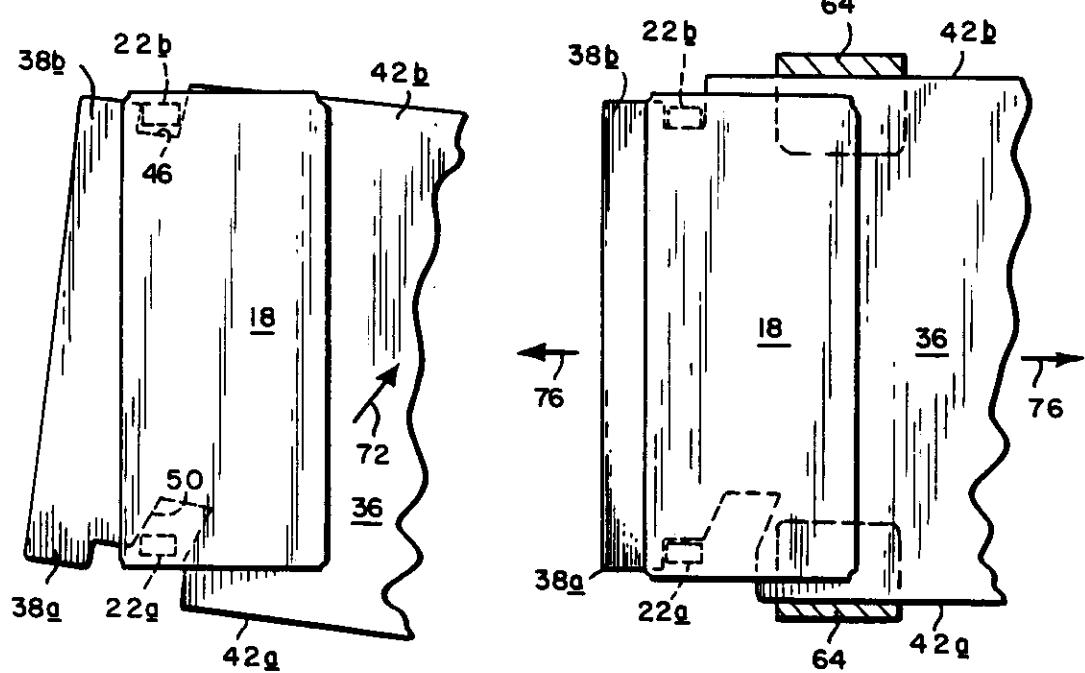


FIG. 8

FIG. 9

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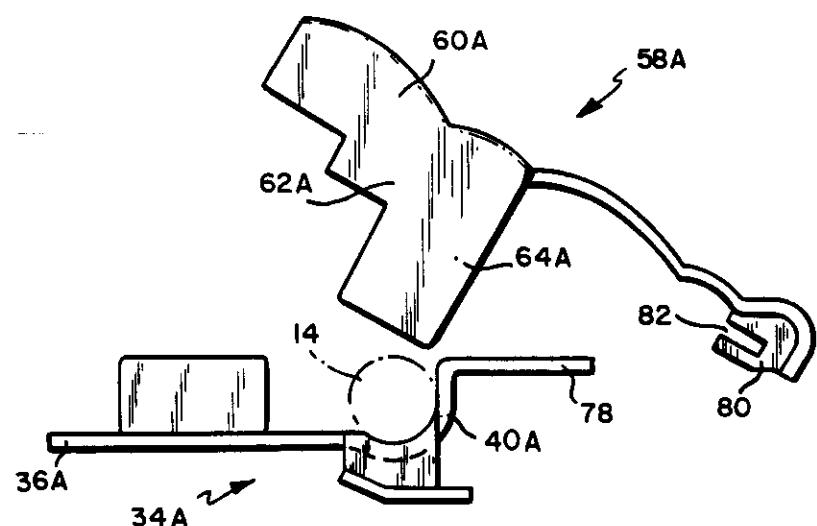


FIG. 10

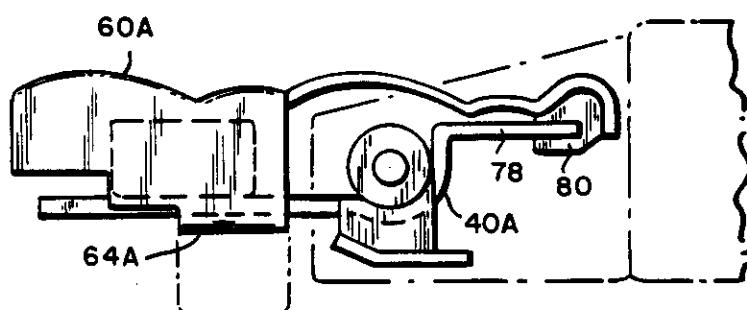


FIG. 11

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END CONNECTOR FOR EXPANSIBLE
WATCH BAND

This invention relates to expandible watch bands, and is concerned in particular with an improved end connector for connecting the ends of such bands to conventional spring bars or the like carried on watch cases.

The conventional expandible watch band typically includes a row of box like top links overlying a row of box like bottom links, with the links of one row being staggered in relation to those of the other row. The top and bottom links are interconnected by pairs of U-shaped staples, with the staples of each pair being located along opposite edges respectively of the band in a mutually confronting relationship. The staples have legs which protrude inwardly into the ends of the links to cooperate with internal springs in providing a means of accommodating longitudinal expansion and contraction of the band. Typically, the top links are covered with ornamental top shells.

In many cases, the endmost top shells are replaced by connectors which match the designs of the top shells and which serve to connect the ends of the bands to spring bars or the like carried on the watch cases. Such connectors have deformable tabs which are bent into engagement with the underlying endmost top links. Where the design of the top shells is relatively plain, e.g., with straight flat sides corresponding to those of the underlying top links, there is ample material available to provide robust tabs at locations selected to optimize the

integrity of the resulting connection.

However, in situations where the design of the connectors is more complicated, including for example curved and indented side walls, the formation and/or location of the tabs is often of necessity somewhat compromised. Thus, very precise tab bending becomes critical, for otherwise the connectors may loosen and separate themselves from the band, resulting in loss of the watch.

In order to minimize the chance of this happening, the connectors are factory installed by closely monitored automated tools. Distributors and retailers are cautioned against removing the end connectors. Thus, when the bands require shortening, links are removed at a location intermediate the band ends. This is a complicated and time consuming procedure which entails carefully reassembling staples, internal springs, etc.

We will describe

an improved end connector which obviates or at least significantly minimizes the above-described problems and disadvantages associated with the prior art.

We will describe an end connector which can be securely and reliably connected to an end of the band, without requiring precise bending of tabs or the like.

We will describe

an end connector which has the capability of establishing a secure connection to the endmost top link of the band, regardless of the complexity of design of the connector required to match that of the ornamental top shells.

We will also describe

an improved connector which includes a base member located between the endmost top and bottom links in secure interlocked engagement with the endmost pair of interconnecting staples, with a cover member overlying and cooperating in engagement with the endmost top link and the base member to maintain the aforesaid location of the base member.

These and other features and advantages will become more apparent as the description proceeds with the aid of the accompanying drawings, wherein:

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a top plan view of a watch band connected to a watch case by means of an end connector in accordance with the present invention;

Figure 2 is a sectional view on an enlarged scale taken along line 2-2 of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a sectional view taken along line 3-3 of Figure 2;

Figure 4 is an enlarged top plan view showing the end connector separated from the end of the band;

Figure 5 is a side view of the components shown in Figure 4;

Figures 6-9 are somewhat schematic illustrations depicting the steps involved in assembling the end connector to the end of the band;

Figure 10 is a side view showing an alternate embodiment of an end connector partially assembled onto the end of a watch band; and

Figure 11 is a view similar to Figure 10 showing the end connector in its fully assembled and interconnected with the band end.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring initially to Figures 1-9, an end connector in accordance with one embodiment of the invention is generally depicted at 10 as providing a connection between an expandible watch band 12 and a conventional spring bar 14 or the like carried on a watch case 16.

The expandible band 12 is of the conventional type having a row of box-like top links 18 overlying a row of box-like bottom links 20. The links 18,20 are staggered in relation to each other in the direction of the bracelet length, and are interconnected by pairs of U-shaped staples 22a,22b. The staples of each pair are located along opposite edges respectively of the band, with legs 24 on the staples received in opposite ends of the links 18,20 connected thereby. The staple legs 24 coact with internal springs 26 in a known manner to accommodate resilient longitudinal expansion and contraction of the band 12. Typically, all but the endmost top links 18 are covered by decorative top shells 28. Often, as in the case herein illustrated, the top shells have ornamentally shaped and interlocking side walls.

The watch case 14 may be of any conventional type, having mutually spaced lugs 30 with the spring bar 14 or the like removably secured therebetween. In certain cases, as best shown for example in Figures 2 and 5, the spring bar 14 may be contained within a sheathe 32 having spring loaded decorative ends (not shown).

The end connector 10 shown in Figures 1-9 comprise a base member 34 having a generally planar shank 36. The shank is provided at one end with engagement means in the form of first and second ears 38a,38b

extending laterally in opposite directions. A hook portion 40 is integrally formed at the opposite end of the shank 36. The hook portion 40 is configured to at least partially surround and engage the spring bar 14 (or as in this case, the sheathe 32 containing the spring bar 14). The shank has side edges 42a,42b extending between the hook portion 40 and the ears 38a,38b.

As can best be seen in Figure 4, the width "W" of the base member 34 measured at the ears 38a,38b is greater than the spacing "S" between the endmost pair of staples 22a,22b interconnecting the endmost top and bottom links 18,20 of the band. The shank 36 is dimensioned for insertion between the endmost top and bottom links, and the side edges 42a,42b are appropriately configured to accommodate manipulation of the thus inserted shank in its plane in directions required to position the ears 38a,38b respectively behind the endmost staples 22a,22b.

More particularly, it will be seen that the side edges 42a,42b respectively have first and second staple-receiving notches 44, 46 respectively located adjacent to and immediately inboard of the first and second ears 38a,38b. A third notch 48 is located adjacent to and inboard of the first notch 44. The third notch 48 has a depth greater than the depth of the first notch 44. The third notch 48 is at least partially defined by a camming edge 50 which extends angularly inwardly towards the center of the shank from the base 52 of the first notch 44 to the base 54 of the third notch 48. The second notch 46 is at least partially defined by a stop edge 56 which extends laterally outwardly beyond the second ear 38b.

The end connector 10 further includes a cover member 58 having a cap portion 60 with side walls 62. The

side walls 62 have bendable side tabs 64 extending downwardly therefrom. A nose portion 66 is shaped to partially surround and engage the hook portion 40 of the base member. In the embodiment of Figures 1-9, the cover member and base member are integrally combined, with the cover member being rotatable relative to the base member about the axis of the spring bar 14 between an open position as shown in Figures 4 and 5 and a closed position as shown in Figures 1-3.

The manner of connecting the base member 34 to the band end will now be described. The cover member 58 is first opened to the position shown in Figures 4 and 5. Then, as illustrated in Figure 6, the shank 36 is inserted in the direction of arrow 68 between the endmost top and bottom links. In so doing, the endmost staple 22a is received in the third notch 48 against the base 54 thereof. Next, as shown in Figure 7, the shank 36 is rotated about the staple 22a in the direction of arrow 70 to thus bring the stop edge 56 of the second notch 46 against the other endmost staple 22b. Then, as shown in Figure 8, the shank and band are separated, causing the shank to shift in relation to the band in the direction of arrow 72 as the camming edge 50 slides across staple 22a. As this shifting progresses, the other staple 22b gradually enters the second notch 46 and the shank gradually moves into longitudinal alignment with the band, as shown in Figure 9. At this point, the ears 38a,38b are respectively located behind and in interlocked engagement with the staples 22a,22b.

Once the shank 36 is located in longitudinal alignment with the band between the endmost top and bottom links 18,20, with the ears 38a,38b securely interlocked

behind their respective endmost staples 22a,22b, the cover member 58 is rotated to the closed position shown in Figures 1-3. The endmost top link 18 is then hidden beneath the cap portion 60, which is decoratively shaped to match the appearance of the top shells 28. As can be best seen in Figure 3, the side walls 62 of the cap portion contact angular end flaps 74 on the top link 18, thereby preventing lateral shifting of the end connector relative to the band. The side tabs 64 are then bent under the shank 36 to complete the attachment of the end connector to the band.

It will be seen, therefore, that the end connector is securely attached to the end of the band by virtue of the interengagement of the ears 38a,38b behind the staples 22a,22b. In order to achieve this, the shank must undergo some shifting relative to the band in the direction of arrow 72 (Figure 8). Once the cover member 58 is closed, any shifting of the shank in a direction opposite to that of arrow 72 is precluded by the containment of the side flaps 74 on the top link 18 between the side walls 62 of the cap portion. The bending of the tabs 64 beneath the shank 36 merely serves to hold the cover in the closed position. Separating forces in the direction of arrows 76 in Figure 9 will be resisted by the interengagement of the ears 38a,38b and staples 22a,22b. The bendable tabs 64 are effectively isolated from such separating forces. Thus, even if the bending of the tabs 64 is less than precise, the integrity of the attachment of the end connector to the band will not be compromised as long as the cover member is held in the closed position.

In the embodiment shown in Figures 10 and 11, the

base member 34A and cover member 58A comprise separable components. The base member has a shank 36A and laterally protruding ears (not shown) which are identical to those previously described in connection with the embodiment of Figures 1-9. The manner of connecting the base member 34A to the band end is identical to that described in Figures 6-9. However, the hook portion 40A of base member 34A is arranged to underlie the spring bar 14, with a flange 78 protruding rearwardly therefrom.

The cover member 58A again has a cap portion 60A and side walls 62A with downwardly protruding bendable tabs 64A. The nose portion 66A is provided with side walls 80 having notches 82. When the cover member 58A is assembled onto the base member 34A in a closed position as illustrated in Figure 11, the notches 82 engage the flange 78, and the tabs 64A are again bent to underlie the shank 36A.

CLAIMS

1. For use in combination with an expandible watch band of the type having top and bottom links interconnected by pairs of U-shaped staples, the staples of each pair being located along opposite edges respectively of the band in a mutually spaced confronting relationship, with legs on the staples received in opposite ends of the links interconnected thereby, a connector for connecting an end of the band to a spring bar or the like carried on a watch case, said connector comprising: a base member having a generally planar shank with engagement means at one end thereof, a hook portion at the opposite end thereof, and with side edges extending along said shank from said hook portion to said engagement means, the width of said base member at said engagement means being greater than the spacing between the endmost pair of staples interconnecting the endmost top and bottom links of the band, said shank being dimensioned for insertion between said endmost top and bottom links and said side edges being configured to accommodate manipulation of the thus inserted shank in the plane of said shank in directions required to position said engagement means behind said endmost pair of staples, with separation of said base member from the band being prevented by engagement of said endmost staples with the thus positioned engagement means and the side edges of the thus inserted shank, said hook portion being configured to engage the spring bar, and a cover

member overlying and engageable with said endmost top link and the thus inserted shank in a manner preventing reverse manipulation of said shank in directions oposite to said first mentioned directions.

2. The connector of claim 1 wherein said engagement means comprises first and second ears extending laterally in opposite directions from said shank.

3. The connector of claim 2 wherein said side edges are configured to provide first and second staple-receiving notches respectively located adjacent to said first and second ears.

4. The connector of claim 3 further comprising a third notch located adjacent to and having a depth greater than that of said first notch.

5. The connector of claim 4 wherein said third notch is at least partially defined by a camming edge.

6. The connector of claim 5 wherein said camming edge extends angularly inwardly towards the center of said shank from the base of said first notch to the base of said third notch.

7. The connector of claim 6 wherein said second notch is at least partially defined by stop edge.

8. The connector of claim 7 wherein said stop edge extends laterally outwardly beyond said second ear.

9. The connector of claim 7 wherein the

depth of said third notch is such that said shank is inserted between said endmost top and bottom links with one of said endmost staples seated against the base of said third notch, said second ear is located inwardly of the other of said staples, thereby permitting said base member to be rotated in the plane of said shank about the said one endmost staple to an intermediate position at which the other of said endmost staples is in contact with said stop edge and spaced laterally outwardly from the base of said second notch.

10. The connector of claim 9 wherein in response to movement of the intermediately positioned base member away from said band in the direction of the longitudinal band axis, said camming edge will contact and move across said one endmost staple, with an accompanying lateral shifting of said shank to a position at which said endmost staples are seated respectively in said first and second notches in engagement with said first and second ears.

11. The connector of claim 1 wherein said cover member is connected to said hook portion.

12. The connector of claim 11 wherein said cover member is rotatable relative to said base member about the axis of said spring bar.

13. The connector of any one of claims 1, 11 or 12 wherein said cover member is integrally connected to said base member.

14. The connector of claim 1 wherein said

cover member is separably connected to said base member.

15. The connector of claim 14 wherein said hook portion includes a flange, and wherein said cover member is engageable with said flange.

16. The end connector of claim 1 wherein said cover member is adjustable between an open position permitting said reverse manipulation, and a closed position preventing said reverse manipulation, said cover member having deformable tab means engageable with said shank to retain said cover member in said closed position.

17. The connector as claimed in claim 1 substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to Figures 1 to 9 or Figures 10 and 11 of the accompanying drawings.

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Title END CONNECTOR FOR EXPANSIBLE WATCH BAND

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***** END OF REGISTER ENTRY *****

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