



(51) International Patent Classification:

B01D 53/14 (2006.01) **C10L 3/10** (2006.01)
C07C 7/11 (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:

PCT/US2018/023313

(22) International Filing Date:

20 March 2018 (20.03.2018)

(25) Filing Language:

English

(26) Publication Language:

English

(30) Priority Data:

62/474,151	21 March 2017 (21.03.2017)	US
15/926,099	20 March 2018 (20.03.2018)	US

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(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every
kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM,
AO, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BN, BR, BW, BY, BZ,
CA, CH, CL, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DJ, DK, DM, DO,

(54) Title: LIGHT OIL REFLUX HEAVIES REMOVAL PROCESS

Figure 3: Simplified Diagram of Light Oil Reflux Heavies Removal Process (Example 2)

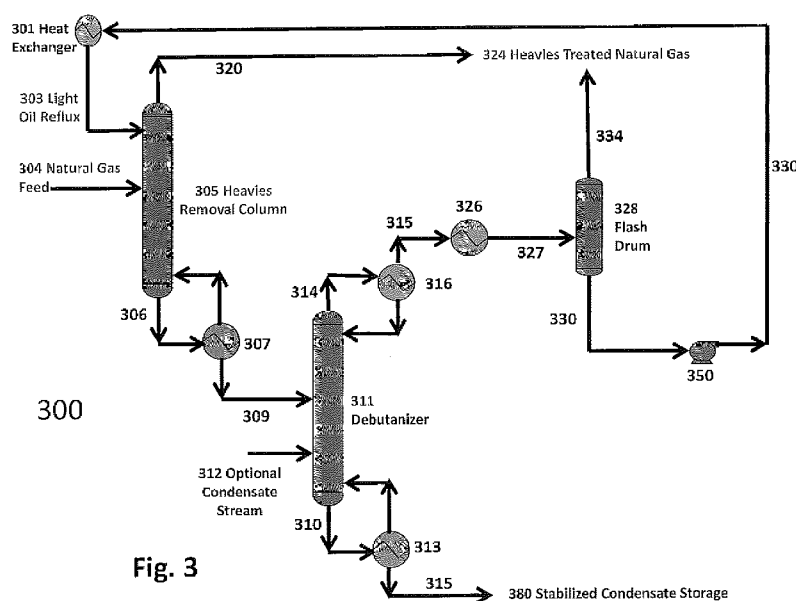


Fig. 3

(57) **Abstract:** The invention relates to various nonlimiting embodiments that include methods, apparatuses or systems for processing natural gas comprising a heavies removal column processing natural gas and light oil reflux. The overhead stream goes to heavies treated natural gas storage. The heavies removal column reboiler bottoms stream product is input to a debutanizer column. The debutanizer column overhead lights are input to a flash drum where the bottoms is pumped through a heat exchanger as a light oil reflux input to the heavies removal column, while the debutanizer reboiler bottoms product is stored as stabilized condensate. Alternatively, debutanizer column overhead lights are sent to heavies treated gas storage and the bottoms stream product goes to a depentanizer column, the overhead lights are pumped through a heat exchanger as a light oil reflux input to the heavies removal column, while the depentanizer reboiler bottoms product is stabilized condensate.

DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IR, IS, JO, JP, KE, KG, KH, KN, KP, KR, KW, KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PA, PE, PG, PH, PL, PT, QA, RO, RS, RU, RW, SA, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, ST, SV, SY, TH, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(84) Designated States (*unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available*): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LR, LS, MW, MZ, NA, RW, SD, SL, ST, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, RU, TJ, TM), European (AL, AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK, SM, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, KM, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:

- *with international search report (Art. 21(3))*
- *before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of receipt of amendments (Rule 48.2(h))*

LIGHT OIL REFLUX HEAVIES REMOVAL PROCESS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates generally to a method and apparatus for processing natural gas. In another aspect, methods and apparatus are provided for removing heavies from natural gas using a light oil reflux in a heavies removal unit.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] In the processing of natural gas there are several challenges with the existing heavies removal processes. In the current heavies removal system for the LNG Optimized Cascade Process, as the natural gas feed becomes leaner in C2 through C5, but not in C6+ components, an increased lean reflux rate to the heavies removal column results. The rate increases in order to remove C6+ components. This in turn results in increased process operating and capital expenditures as a result of increased natural gas flow to the compressors in the reflux loop (i.e. the reflux stream is sent to compressors while still a gas before being condensed and directed to the heavies removal column).

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0003] Various nonlimiting embodiments include methods, apparatuses or systems for processing natural gas comprising a heavies removal column receiving and processing natural gas and light oil reflux. The first overhead stream goes to heavies treated natural gas storage. The heavies removal column reboiler bottoms stream product is input to a debutanizer column. The debutanizer column overhead lights go to a flash drum where flash drum bottoms is pumped through a heat exchanger as a light oil reflux input to the heavies removal column, while the debutanizer reboiler bottoms product is routed to stabilized condensate storage. Alternatively, debutanizer column overhead lights are sent to heavies treated gas storage and the bottoms stream product goes to a depentanizer column, where the overhead lights are pumped through a heat exchanger as a light oil reflux input to the heavies removal column, while the depentanizer reboiler bottoms product is routed to stabilized condensate storage.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0004] A more complete understanding of the present invention and benefits thereof may be acquired by referring to the follow description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

[0005] **Fig. 1** illustrates a heavies removal process using an external lean reflux;

[0006] **Fig. 2** illustrates a heavies removal unit design using a light oil reflux; and

[0007] **Fig. 3** illustrates an alternative heavies removal unit design using a light oil reflux.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0008] Turning now to the detailed description of the preferred arrangement or arrangements of the present invention, it should be understood that the inventive features and concepts may be manifested in other arrangements and that the scope of the invention is not limited to the embodiments described or illustrated. The scope of the invention is intended only to be limited by the scope of the claims that follow.

[0009] One of the main issues with the current heavies removal system in the LNG Optimized Cascade Process is that as the natural gas feed becomes leaner in C2 through C5, but not in C6+ components, this results in increased lean reflux rate to the heavies removal column in order to remove C6+ components. This in turn increases process opex and capex as a result of increased natural gas flow to the compressors in the reflux loop when the reflux stream is sent to compressors while still a gas before being condensed and directed to the heavies removal column.

[0010] Embodiments disclosed herein improve processing by replacing the lean reflux stream with a light oil reflux stream. The light oil stream eliminates the need for reflux gas compression and increases the separation efficiency of the heavy components from the natural gas via either a C4-C5 reflux stream or external condensate stream. The methods, processes and systems disclosed herein reduce the opex and potentially the capex of the heavies removal process by reducing the need for gas compression. Due to its ability to use an external condensate stream it also has the ability to run leaner feeds than the current process.

[0011] The Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Optimized Cascade Process uses a heavies removal distillation column to eliminate C6+ hydrocarbons (i.e. heavy components) from

the natural gas prior to condensing the gas to LNG (Note: Gas has already been amine treated and dehydrated prior to heavies removal). Heavies removal is done to prevent freezing from occurring in the liquefaction heat exchangers and to moderate the heating value of the LNG. It also prevents LNG from going off spec due to increased levels of heavy components.

[0012] The following examples of certain embodiments of the invention are given. Each example is provided by way of explanation of the invention, one of many embodiments of the invention, and the following examples should not be read to limit, or define, the scope of the invention.

[0013] As illustrated in **Fig. 1**, a simplified diagram of a lean reflux heavies removal process **100**, the heavies removal process includes feeding chilled external lean reflux natural gas **103**, which has been piped through heat exchanger **101** to the top of the heavies removal column **105** where most of the C6+ components are removed. The heavies removal column **105** also receives a natural gas feed **104** to be processed. The heavies liquid bottom stream **106**, passes through reboiler **107**, the bottom stream product **109** is then sent to a stabilizer (or debutanizer) column **111** where the debutanizer bottom stream **112** is passed through reboiler **113** and as the heavier components are removed as a bottom stream product as stabilized condensate **115** for sale. The lighter overhead components **114** are separated with condenser **116** into a methane rich recycle stream and external lean reflux stream **118** that is sent to compressors **140** and may be sent to heat exchanger **101** for delivery as external lean reflux **103** to the heavies removal column **105**. The heavies treated natural gas **124** exits the top of the heavies removal column **105**. This overhead stream **124** can now be further cooled by one or more heat exchangers **126**, **127** and pass into flash drum **128** to be separated as overhead **129** to deliver to compressors **140**, or exit the flash drum bottom outlet as distillate **130** and be pumped **132** to LNG storage/tankage **134**.

[0014] In contrast to **100**, the system, methods and apparatus disclosed herein provide for reducing the opex and potentially the capex of the heavies removal process by reducing the need for gas compression. The invention also increases the separation efficiency of the heavy components from the natural gas via either a C4-C5 reflux stream or external condensate stream. Embodiments disclosed here also have the flexibility of

blending back in some of the condensed depentanizer overhead into its bottom stream if needed. In addition, condensate can also be injected into the depentanizer in cases where increased reflux is needed to remove heavies from the natural gas feed. This, therefore, allows improved processing compared to processing very lean gas feeds in a two or three column design without condensate injection. Also, due to operating conditions in the plant, minimal losses of injected condensate are expected. Finally, the optional outside condensate allows simple startup for very lean feeds and minimal required storage.

[0015] **Fig. 2** is a diagram of a light oil reflux heavies removal process **200**. Nonlimiting embodiments of the system, methods and apparatus disclosed herein provides for replacing the LNG reflux stream **203** with a light oil reflux stream (C4-C5) or external condensate stream **212**. As illustrated in **Fig. 2**, the light oil reflux stream **203** (or external condensate stream) is fed to the heavies removal column **205** to remove the C6+ components within the natural gas feed **204**. The resulting liquid bottom stream **206** is then fed to the debutanizer followed by a depentanizer to stabilize the condensate for sale (Note: Optionally, the columns can be a depropanizer followed by a debutanizer). After the resulting heavies removal column bottom liquid stream **206** passes through reboiler **207**, the resulting liquid bottom product stream **209** passes into the debutanizer **211**. The lighter elements **214** in the overhead of the debutanizer **211** are separated with condenser **216** and the overhead lights **218** sent to the heavies treated natural gas **224**. The overhead from the depentanizer column **228** is treated to obtain a light oil reflux **203** and/or stabilized condensate **215**.

[0016] In more specificity, an apparatus or system for processing natural gas comprises a heavies removal column **205** that has a natural gas feed **204** inlet and a light oil reflux feed **203** inlet, the natural gas feed inlet being at a lower elevation than the light oil reflux gas feed inlet, and a first overhead outlet for sending a first overhead stream **220** to a heavies treated natural gas storage **224**. A first reboiler **207** is downstream from a bottoms outlet of the heavies removal column **205**, the first reboiler **207** receives a heavies removal column bottoms stream **206**. A debutanizer column **211** is downstream from the first reboiler **207** for receiving a first reboiler bottoms stream product **209**. The debutanizer column **211** has a first condenser **216** and a second reboiler **213**. The second reboiler **213** produces a second reboiler bottoms stream product **217**. The first condenser

216 partially separates a debutanizer overhead stream **214** into a debutanizer overhead stream lights **218** that may be routed to heavies treated natural gas storage **224**. A depentanizer column **228** downstream of the second reboiler **213** for receiving the second reboiler bottoms stream product **217**, the depentanizer column **228** comprising, a second reboiler bottom stream product inlet, a second condenser **226** and a third reboiler **240**, wherein the depentanizer column **228** also comprises an inlet for an optional condensate stream feed **212**, the second condenser **226** for partially separating a depentanizer overhead stream **225** into depentanizer overhead stream lights **227**. The heavies liquid bottom stream **229**, passes through reboiler **240**, and the heavier components are removed as a bottom stream product as stabilized condensate **215** for sale. A first heat exchanger **234** is downstream of the second condenser **226**, the first heat exchanger **234** for obtaining a light oil **235**. A pump **250** is downstream from the first heat exchanger **234** for pumping the light oil **235** to a second heat exchanger **201** downstream from the pump **250**, the second heat exchanger **201** for providing the light oil reflux **203**. The heavies removal column light oil reflux feed inlet is downstream from the second heat exchanger.

[0017] In another aspect, the heavies treated natural gas storage is downstream from the overhead outlet of the heavies removal column. A compressor may be downstream from the overhead outlet of the heavies removal column for compressing heavies treated natural gas or downstream from an overhead outlet of the flash drum for compressing heavies treated natural gas. Also, a stabilized condensate storage reservoir may be downstream from the third reboiler.

[0018] Similarly a method for natural gas processing is illustrated with **Fig. 2**, including introducing a natural gas feed **204** and a light oil reflux gas feed **203** to the heavies removal column **205**. The natural gas feed **204** and the light oil reflux gas feed **203** is processed in the heavies removal column **205** to produce a first bottoms stream **206** and a first overhead stream **220**, wherein the first bottoms stream **206** is routed to a first reboiler **207**, and the first reboiler bottoms stream product **209** is routed to a debutanizer column **211**, and the heavies removal column overhead stream **220** is routed to heavies treated natural gas storage **224**. The first reboiler bottoms stream product **209** is processed in the debutanizer column **211** to produce a second bottoms stream **210** and a second overhead stream **214**, wherein the second bottoms stream **210** is routed to a

second reboiler **213** and then the second reboiler bottom stream product **217** is input to a depentanizer column **228**, and the second overhead stream **214** is routed through a condenser **216** for partial separation of the second overhead stream **214** into second overhead stream lights **218** that is routed to heavies treated natural gas storage **224**. The second reboiler bottom stream product **217** is processed in the depentanizer column **228** to produce a third bottoms stream **229** and a third overhead stream **225**, wherein the third bottoms stream **229** is routed to a third reboiler **240** and wherein the third reboiler bottom stream product **215** is routed as a stabilized condensate to storage, and the third overhead stream **225** is routed through a condenser **226** for partial separation of the third overhead stream **225** into third overhead stream lights **227**. The third overhead stream lights **227** is routed to a first heat exchanger **234** to obtain a light oil **235**. The light oil **235** is routed through a pump **250** to a second heat exchanger **201** to obtain a light oil reflux **203** and provide the light oil reflux **203** to the heavies removal column **205**.

[0019] In other aspects, the heavies treated natural gas from the heavies removal column may be routed to a compressor for storage of heavies treated natural gas. The light oil reflux feed inlet is positioned on the heavies removal column at a higher elevation than the natural gas feed inlet. An optional condensate stream **212** is introduced to the depentanizer column. This condensate stream introduced to the depentanizer may comprise butane and pentane.

[0020] These embodiments eliminate the need for reflux gas compression. In fact, the overall energy usage of heavies removal is reduced, for example, on one lean natural gas feed by over 80% as compared to the conventional processes. In addition, it increases the separation efficiency of the heavy components from the natural gas via either a C4-C5 reflux stream and/or external condensate stream. In the case of **200** the external stream **212** can be inputted into the process via the depentanizer **228**. Also, the system, methods and apparatus provided has the flexibility of blending back in some of the condensed depentanizer overhead **225** into its bottom stream output by routing the depentanizer overhead **225** through the condenser **226**, the heat exchanger **234**, to pump **250**, then by path **260** routing to storage or sale as stabilized condensate **215**.

[0021] An alternative process to the illustration in **200** is illustrated with the diagram of **Fig. 3**, an alternate simplified diagram of light oil reflux heavies removal process **300**.

The system, methods and apparatus provides for replacing a LNG reflux stream with a light oil reflux stream (C4-C5) **303**.

[0022] As illustrated in **Fig. 3**, a method for natural gas processing includes introducing a natural gas feed **304** and a light oil reflux gas feed **303** to a heavies removal column **305**. The natural gas feed **304** and the light oil reflux gas feed **303** are processed in the heavies removal column **305** to produce a first bottoms stream **306** and a first overhead stream **320**. The first bottoms stream **306** is routed to a first reboiler **307** to separate a first reboiler bottom stream product **309** and then route the first reboiler bottom stream product **309** to a debutanizer column **311** and the first overhead stream **320** is routed to heavies treated natural gas storage **324**. The first reboiler bottoms stream product **309** is processed in the debutanizer column **311** to produce a second bottoms stream **310** and a second overhead stream **314**. The second bottoms stream **310** is routed to a second reboiler **313** and then the second reboiler bottom stream product **315** is routed to stabilized condensate storage. The second overhead stream **314** is routed through a condenser **316** for partial separation of the second overhead stream **314** into second overhead stream lights **315**. The second overhead stream lights **315** is routed to a first heat exchanger **326** and then the first heat exchanger lights **327** are routed to a flash drum **328**. In the flash drum **328**, the first heat exchanger lights **327** are separated into a flash drum bottoms light oil reflux stream **330** and a flash drum overhead heavies treated natural gas **334**. The heavies treated natural gas **334** is routed from the flash drum overhead outlet to heavies treated natural gas storage **324** and the flash drum bottoms light oil reflux stream **330** is routed through a pump **350** to a second heat exchanger **301** to obtain the light oil reflux gas feed **303**.

[0023] In other aspect the heavies treated natural gas is routed from the flash drum to a compressor for storage of heavies treated natural gas. The light oil reflux feed inlet is positioned on the heavies removal column at a higher elevation than the natural gas feed inlet. A condensate stream **312** may be introduced to the debutanizer column **311**. This condensate stream introduced to the debutanizer may comprise of butanes and pentanes. The light oil reflux may predominantly include one or more of isobutane, normal butane, and isopentane and normal pentane.

[0024] Other nonlimiting embodiments provided herein, also illustrated with **Fig. 3**, include an apparatus or system for processing natural gas that includes a heavies removal column **305** comprising a natural gas feed **304** inlet and a light oil reflux **303** feed inlet, with the natural gas feed inlet at a lower elevation than the light oil reflux gas feed inlet. A first reboiler **307** is downstream from a bottoms outlet of the heavies removal column **305** for receiving a bottoms stream **306** from a bottoms outlet of the heavies removal column **305**. A debutanizer column **311** is downstream from the first reboiler **307**, the debutanizer column **311** comprising an inlet for a first reboiler bottoms stream product **309**, a first condenser **316** and a second reboiler **313**. The debutanizer column **311** may have an inlet for an optional condensate stream **312** feed. The first condenser **316** is to partially separate a natural gas overhead **314** into first condenser overhead stream lights **315**. A first heat exchanger **326** is downstream of the first condenser **316** for producing first heat exchanger overhead stream lights **327**. A flash drum **328** is downstream from the first heat exchanger **326** and is configured to separate, from the first heat exchanger overhead stream lights **327**, heavies treated natural gas **334** expelled through the flash drum **328** overhead outlet, and a light oil reflux stream **330** expelled from the flash drum **328** bottoms outlet. A pump **350** is downstream from the bottoms outlet of the flash drum **328** to pump the light reflux stream **330** to a second heat exchanger **301** downstream of the pump **350**, which second heat exchanger is upstream to the heavies removal column light oil reflux feed inlet.

[0025] In other aspects a heavies treated natural gas storage is located downstream from the overhead outlet of the heavies removal column. A compressor may be downstream from an overhead outlet of the heavies removal column for compressing heavies treated natural gas. Also a compressor may be downstream from an overhead outlet of the flash drum for compressing heavies treated natural gas. Further, there may be a stabilized condensate storage reservoir downstream from the reboiler of the debutanizer column.

[0026] In closing, it should be noted that the discussion of any reference is not an admission that it is prior art to the present invention, especially any reference that may have a publication date after the priority date of this application. At the same time, each

and every claim below is hereby incorporated into this detailed description or specification as a additional embodiments of the present invention.

[0027] Although the systems and processes described herein have been described in detail, it should be understood that various changes, substitutions, and alterations can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the following claims. Those skilled in the art may be able to study the preferred embodiments and identify other ways to practice the invention that are not exactly as described herein. It is the intent of the inventors that variations and equivalents of the invention are within the scope of the claims while the description, abstract and drawings are not to be used to limit the scope of the invention. The invention is specifically intended to be as broad as the claims below and their equivalents.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for natural gas processing comprising:
 - a) introducing a natural gas feed to a heavies removal column;
 - b) introducing a light oil reflux gas feed to the heavies removal column;
 - c) processing the natural gas feed and the light oil reflux gas feed in the heavies removal column to produce a first bottoms stream and a first overhead stream, wherein the first bottoms stream and the first overhead stream are separate streams upon expulsion from the heavies removal column, wherein the first bottoms stream is routed to a first reboiler to separate a first reboiler bottom stream product and then route the first reboiler bottom stream product to a debutanizer column and the first overhead stream is routed to heavies treated natural gas storage;
 - d) processing the first reboiler bottoms stream product in the debutanizer column to produce a second bottoms stream and a second overhead stream, wherein the second bottoms stream and the second overhead stream are separate streams upon expulsion from the debutanizer column, wherein the second bottoms stream is routed to a second reboiler and then the second reboiler bottom stream product is routed to stabilized condensate storage, and the second overhead stream is routed through a condenser for partial separation of the second overhead stream into second overhead stream lights;
 - e) routing the second overhead stream lights to a first heat exchanger and then routing the first heat exchanger lights to a flash drum;
 - f) separating, in the flash drum, the first heat exchanger lights into a flash drum bottoms light oil reflux stream and a flash drum overhead heavies treated natural gas; and
 - g) routing the heavies treated natural gas from the flash drum overhead outlet to heavies treated natural gas storage and routing the flash drum bottoms light oil reflux stream through a pump to a second heat exchanger to obtain a light oil reflux gas feed.

2. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
routing the heavies treated natural gas from the flash drum to a compressor for storage of heavies treated natural gas.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein the light oil reflux feed inlet is positioned on the heavies removal column at a higher elevation than the natural gas feed inlet.
4. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
introducing a condensate stream to the debutanizer column.
5. The method of claim 4 wherein the condensate stream introduced to the debutanizer comprises butane and pentane.
6. The method of claim 1 wherein the light oil reflux comprises a predominant composition of one selected from the group consisting of: i) isopentane, ii) normal pentane, and iii) isopentane and normal pentane.
7. An apparatus for processing natural gas, the apparatus comprising:
 - a) a heavies removal column comprising a natural gas feed inlet and a light oil reflux feed inlet, the natural gas feed inlet at a lower elevation than the light oil reflux gas feed inlet;
 - b) a first reboiler downstream from a bottoms outlet of the heavies removal column for receiving a bottoms stream from a bottoms outlet of the heavies removal column;
 - c) a debutanizer column downstream from the first reboiler, the debutanizer column comprising an inlet for a first reboiler bottoms stream product, a first condenser and a second reboiler, wherein the debutanizer column has an inlet for an optional condensate stream feed and wherein the first condenser partially separates a natural gas overhead into first condenser overhead stream lights;

- d) a first heat exchanger downstream of the first condenser for producing first heat exchanger overhead stream lights;
 - e) a flash drum downstream from the first heat exchanger, which is configured to separate, from the first heat exchanger overhead stream lights, heavies treated natural gas expelled through the flash drum overhead outlet, and a light oil reflux stream expelled from the flash drum bottoms outlet;
 - f) a pump downstream from the bottoms outlet of the flash drum to pump the light reflux stream to a second heat exchanger downstream of the pump, which second heat exchanger is upstream to the heavies removal column light oil reflux feed inlet.
8. The apparatus of Claim 7, further comprising: a heavies treated natural gas storage downstream from the overhead outlet of the heavies removal column.
9. The apparatus of Claim 7, further comprising: a compressor downstream from an overhead outlet of the heavies removal column for compressing heavies treated natural gas.
10. The apparatus of Claim 7, further comprising: a compressor downstream from an overhead outlet of the flash drum for compressing heavies treated natural gas.
11. The apparatus of Claim 7, further comprising: a stabilized condensate storage reservoir downstream from the reboiler of the debutanizer column.
12. A method for natural gas processing comprising:
- a) introducing a natural gas feed to a heavies removal column;
 - b) introducing a light oil reflux gas feed to the heavies removal column;
 - c) processing the natural gas feed and the light oil reflux gas feed in the heavies removal column to produce a first bottoms stream and a first overhead stream, wherein the first bottoms stream and the first overhead stream are separate streams upon expulsion from the heavies removal column, wherein the first bottoms stream is routed to a first reboiler, and

the first reboiler bottoms stream product is routed to a debutanizer column, and the heavies removal column overhead stream is routed to heavies treated natural gas storage;

- d) processing the first reboiler bottoms stream product in the debutanizer column to produce a second bottoms stream and a second overhead stream, wherein the second bottoms stream and the second overhead stream are separate streams upon expulsion from the debutanizer column, wherein the second bottoms stream is routed to a second reboiler and then the second reboiler bottom stream product is input to a depentanizer column, and the second overhead stream is routed through a condenser for partial separation of the second overhead stream into second overhead stream lights that is routed to heavies treated natural gas storage;
- e) processing the second reboiler bottom stream product in the depentanizer column to produce a third bottoms stream and a third overhead stream, wherein the third bottoms stream and the third overhead stream are separate streams upon expulsion from the depentanizer column, wherein the third bottoms stream is routed to a third reboiler and wherein the third reboiler bottom stream product is routed as a stabilized condensate to storage, and the third overhead stream is routed through a condenser for partial separation of the third overhead stream into third overhead stream lights;
- f) routing the third overhead stream lights to a first heat exchanger to obtain a stabilized condensate; and
- g) routing the stabilized condensate through a pump to a second heat exchanger to obtain a light oil reflux and provide the light oil reflux to the heavies removal column.

13. The method of claim 12 further comprising:

routing the heavies treated natural gas from the heavies removal column to a compressor for storage of heavies treated natural gas.

14. The method of claim 12 wherein the light oil reflux feed inlet is positioned on the heavies removal column at a higher elevation than the natural gas feed inlet.
15. The method of claim 12 further comprising:
introducing a condensate stream to the depentanizer column.
16. The method of claim 15 wherein the condensate stream introduced to the depentanizer comprises butane and pentane.
17. An apparatus for processing natural gas, the apparatus comprising:
 - a) a heavies removal column comprising a natural gas feed inlet and a light oil reflux feed inlet, the natural gas feed inlet at a lower elevation than the light oil reflux gas feed inlet, and a first overhead outlet for sending a first overhead stream to heavies treated natural gas storage;
 - b) a first reboiler downstream from a bottoms outlet of the heavies removal column, the first reboiler for receiving a heavies removal column bottoms stream.
 - c) a debutanizer column downstream from the first reboiler for receiving a first reboiler bottoms stream product, the debutanizer column comprising a first condenser and a second reboiler, the second reboiler for obtaining a second reboiler bottoms stream product, and wherein the first condenser for partially separating a debutanizer overhead stream into a debutanizer overhead stream lights to send to heavies treated natural gas storage;
 - d) a depentanizer column downstream of the second reboiler for receiving the second reboiler bottoms stream product, the depentanizer column comprising, a second reboiler bottom stream product inlet, a second condenser and a third reboiler, wherein the depentanizer column also comprises an inlet for an optional condensate stream feed, the second condenser for partially separating a depentanizer overhead stream into depentanizer overhead stream lights;
 - e) a first heat exchanger downstream of the second condenser, the first heat

exchanger for obtaining a stabilized condensate;

- f) a pump downstream from the first heat exchanger for pumping the stabilized condensate to a second heat exchanger downstream from the pump, the second heat exchanger for providing the light oil reflux; and
- g) wherein the heavies removal column light oil reflux feed inlet is downstream from the second heat exchanger.

18. The apparatus of Claim 17, further comprising: a heavies treated natural gas storage downstream from the overhead outlet of the heavies removal column.

19. The apparatus of Claim 17, further comprising: a compressor downstream from an overhead outlet of the heavies removal column for compressing heavies treated natural gas.

20. The apparatus of Claim 17, further comprising: a compressor downstream from an overhead outlet of the flash drum for compressing heavies treated natural gas.

Figure 1: Simplified Diagram of Lean Reflux Heavies Removal Process

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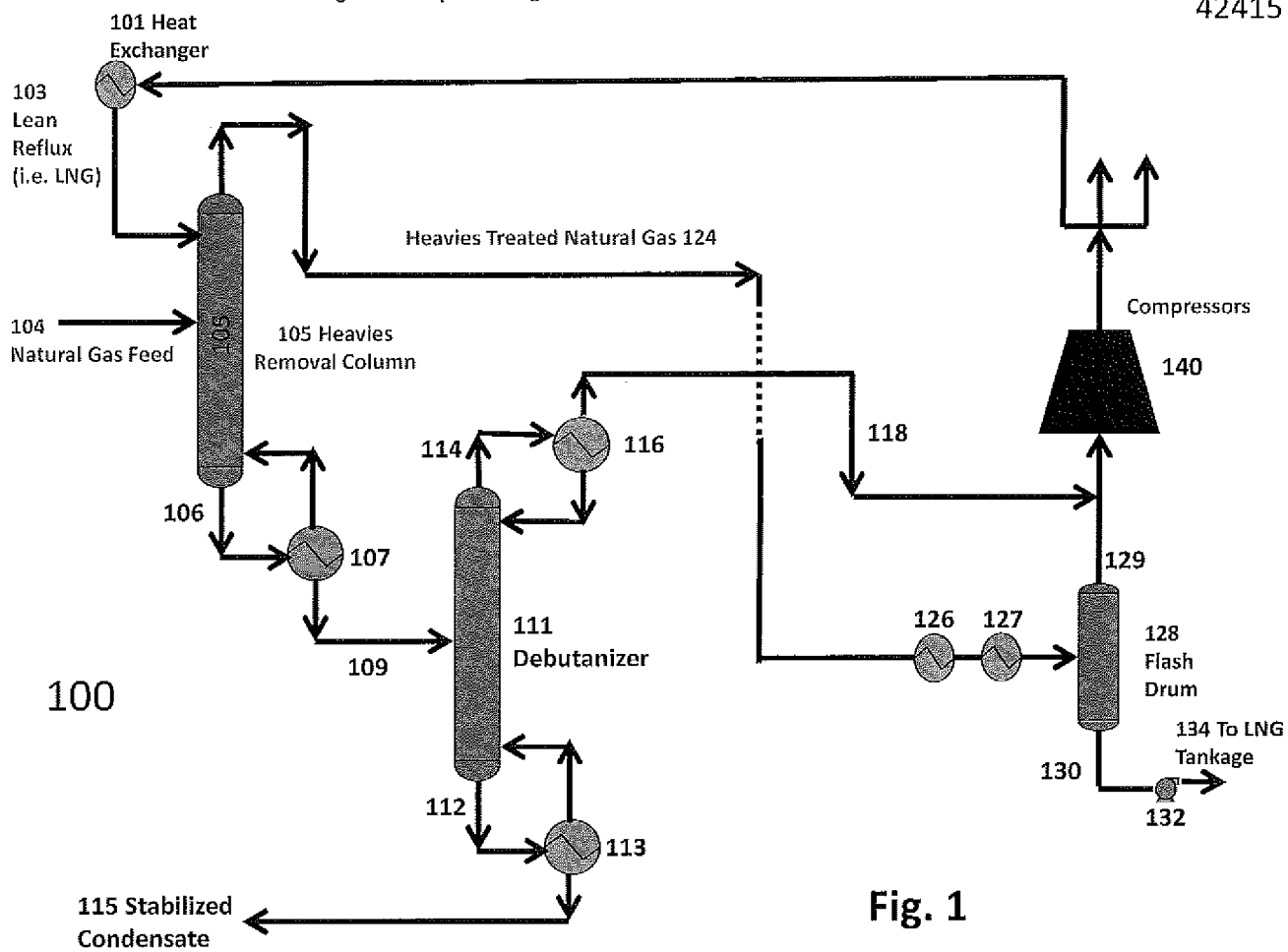


Figure 2: Simplified Diagram of Light Oil Reflux Heavies Removal Process (Example 1)

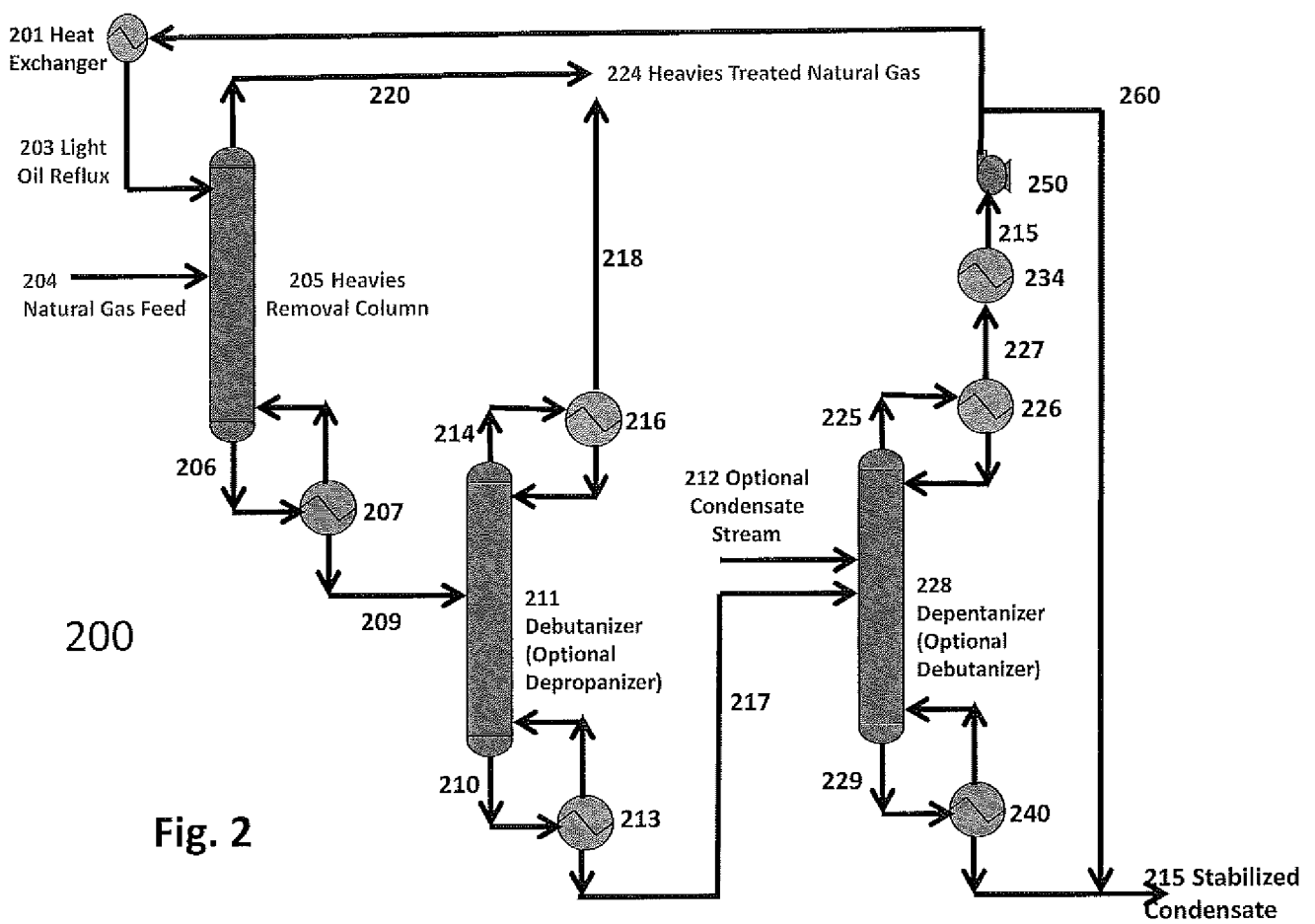


Figure 3: Simplified Diagram of Light Oil Reflux Heavies Removal Process (Example 2)

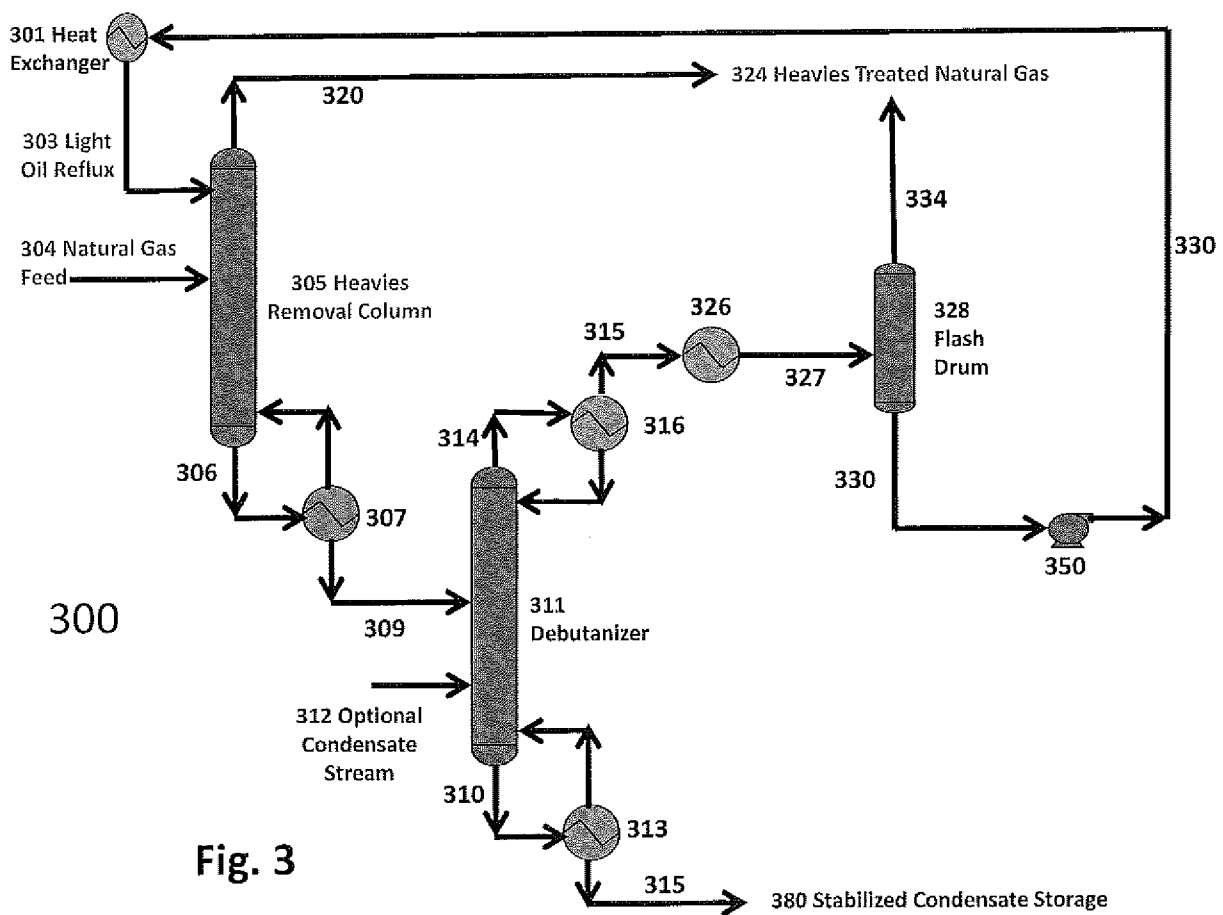


Fig. 1 100

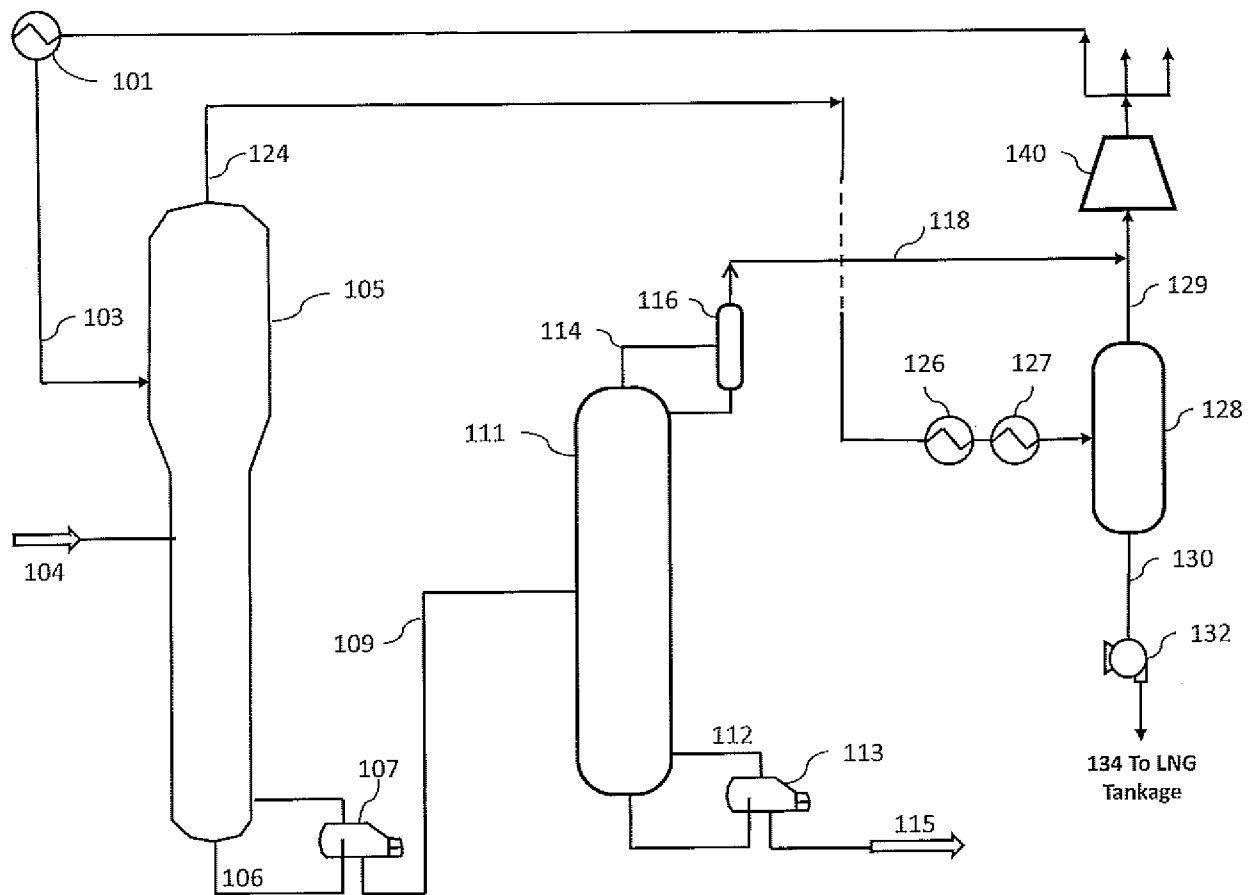


Fig. 2 200

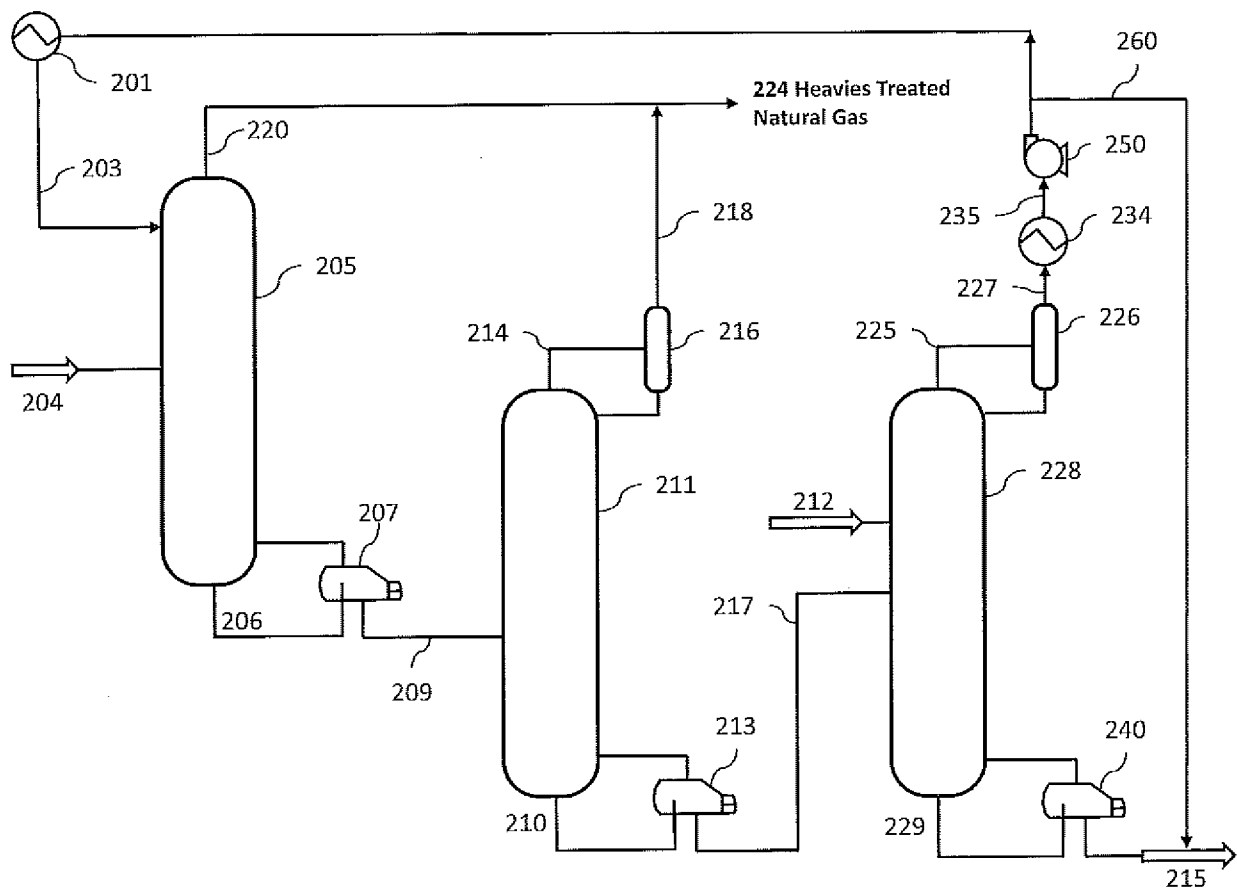
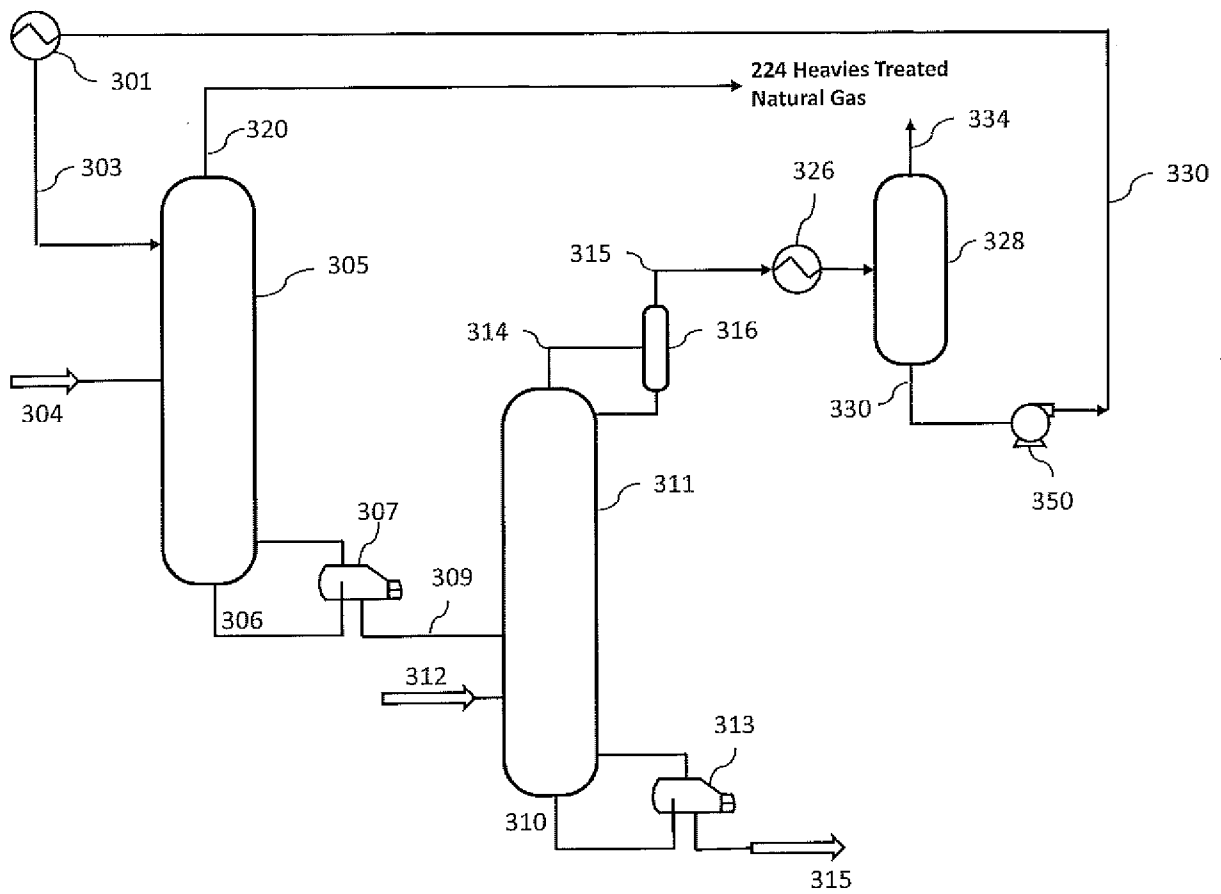


Fig. 3 300



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US18/23313

Box No. II Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This international search report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:

2. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:

3. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

Box No. III Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 3 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

This application contains the following inventions or groups of inventions which are not so linked as to form a single general inventive concept under PCT Rule 13.1. In order for all inventions to be examined, the appropriate additional examination fees must be paid.

Group I: Claims 1-11 directed to natural gas heavies removal column with light oil reflux and a debutanizer where an overhead stream from the debutanizer is condensed to provide the light oil reflux to the heavies removal column.

Group II: Claims 12-20 directed to directed to natural gas heavies removal column with light oil reflux and a debutanizer and depentanizer; where an overhead stream from the debutanizer is stored and the bottoms of the debutanizer is fed to the depentanizer.

-Continued Within the Next Supplemental Box-

1. ☒ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims.
2. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying additional fees, this Authority did not invite payment of additional fees.
3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:

4. ☐ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

Remark on Protest

- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest and, where applicable, the payment of a protest fee.
- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest but the applicable protest fee was not paid within the time limit specified in the invitation.
- ☐ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US18/23313

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC - B01D 53/14; C07C 7/11; C10L 3/10 (2018.01)

CPC - B01D 53/1418, 53/1425; C07C 7/11; C10L 3/00, 3/06, 3/10; 3/101

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)

See Search History document

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

See Search History document

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

See Search History document

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 2008/0016910 A1 (BROSTOW, AA et al.) 24 January 2008; figures 1-5; paragraphs [0059]-[0063], [0082]-[0086]	1-20
Y	US 2002/0059865 A1 (LEMAIRE, E et al.) 23 May 2002; figures 1-2; paragraphs [0009], [0022], [0047], [0064]	1-20
Y	US 4,421,535 A (MEHRA, YR) 20 December 1983; figure 2; column 9, lines 47-67	2, 9
Y	US 2010/0000255 A1 (MAK, J) 07 January 2010; figures 2-3; paragraphs [0023]-[0029], [0032]	6, 10, 20

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

24 July 2018 (24.07.2018)

Date of mailing of the international search report

06 AUG 2018

Name and mailing address of the ISA/

Mail Stop PCT, Attn: ISA/US, Commissioner for Patents

P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450

Facsimile No. 571-273-8300

Authorized officer

Shane Thomas

PCT Helpdesk: 571-272-4300
PCT OSP: 571-272-7774

---Continued from Box No. III Observations where unity of invention is lacking---

The inventions listed as Groups I-II do not relate to a single general inventive concept under PCT Rule 13.1 because, under PCT Rule 13.2, they lack the same or corresponding special technical features for the following reasons:
the special technical features of Group I include debutanizer overhead stream is routed through a condenser for partial separation of the second overhead stream into second overhead stream lights; e) routing the second overhead stream lights to a first heat exchanger and then routing the first heat exchanger lights to a flash drum; f) separating, in the flash drum, the first heat exchanger lights into a flash drum bottoms light oil reflux stream and a flash drum overhead heavies treated natural gas, which are not present in Group II;
the special technical features of Group II include the debutanizer reboiler bottom stream product is input to a depentanizer column, and the second overhead stream is routed through a condenser for partial separation of the second overhead stream into second overhead stream lights that is routed to heavies treated natural gas storage; e) processing the second reboiler bottom stream product in the depentanizer column to produce a third bottoms stream and a third overhead stream, wherein the third bottoms stream and the third overhead stream are separate streams upon expulsion from the depentanizer column, wherein the third bottoms stream is routed to a third reboiler and wherein the third reboiler bottom stream product is routed as a stabilized condensate to storage, and the third overhead stream is routed through a condenser for partial separation of the third overhead stream into third overhead stream lights; f) routing the third overhead stream lights to a first heat exchanger to obtain a stabilized condensate; and g) routing the stabilized condensate through a pump to a second heat exchanger to obtain a light oil reflux and provide the light oil reflux to the heavies removal column, which are not present in Group I.

The common technical features of Groups I-II are a natural gas processing comprising: a) introducing a natural gas feed to a heavies removal column; b) introducing a light oil reflux gas feed to the heavies removal column; c) processing the natural gas feed and the light oil reflux gas feed in the heavies removal column to produce a first bottoms stream and a first overhead stream, wherein the first bottoms stream and the first overhead stream are separate streams upon expulsion from the heavies removal column, wherein the first bottoms stream is routed to a first reboiler to separate a first reboiler bottom stream product and then route the first reboiler bottom stream product to a debutanizer column and the first overhead stream is routed to heavies treated natural gas storage; d) processing the first reboiler bottoms stream product in the debutanizer column to produce a second bottoms stream and a second overhead stream, wherein the second bottoms stream and the second overhead stream are separate streams upon expulsion from the debutanizer column, wherein the second bottoms stream is routed to a second reboiler and then the second reboiler bottom.

These common technical features are disclosed by US 2,959,540A to Cahn, et al. (hereinafter 'Cahn') in view of US 4,421,535 A (MEHRA). Cahn discloses a natural gas processing comprising: a) introducing a natural gas feed to a heavies removal column (absorber 10 (heavies removal column); drawing; column 2, lines 62-69); b) introducing a light oil reflux gas feed to the heavies removal column (light naptha stream 44 into unit 10; drawing; column 3, lines 10-14); c) processing the natural gas feed and the light oil reflux gas feed in the heavies removal column to produce a first bottoms stream and a first overhead stream, wherein the first bottoms stream and the first overhead stream are separate streams upon expulsion from the heavies removal column (unit 10 produces streams 15 (bottoms) and 29 (overhead); drawing; column 3; lines 14-17, lines 47-50), wherein the first bottoms stream is routed to a first reboiler to separate a first reboiler bottom stream product (line 15 feeds reboiler 17 producing line 18 (first reboiler bottom stream product); drawing; column 3, lines 17-25) and then route the first reboiler bottom stream product to a debutanizer column (line 18 to a conventional debutanizer 11; drawing; column 3, lines 23-25) and the first overhead stream is routed to heavies treated natural gas treatment (sponge absorber 12 removes any impurities in stream 29; drawing; column 3, lines 47-56; column 5, lines 5-15); d) processing the first reboiler bottoms stream product in the debutanizer column to produce a second bottoms stream and a second overhead stream, wherein the second bottoms stream and the second overhead stream are separate streams upon expulsion from the debutanizer column (debutanizer 11 produces exit 19 (overheads) and line 25 (bottoms); drawing; column 3, lines 24-34), wherein the second bottoms stream is routed to a second reboiler producing second reboiler bottoms (line 25, heated in unit 27 (reboiler) producing fat oil stream recovered through outlet 28; drawing; column 3, lines 34-40). Cahn does not disclose the first overhead stream is routed to heavies treated natural gas storage. Mehra discloses an overhead stream is routed to heavies treated natural gas storage (overhead gas streams 42 and 72 are compressed and stored in tank 77; figure 2; column 9, lines 47-65). It would have been obvious to a person of ordinary skill in the art, at the time of the invention, to have modified the process, as previously disclosed by Cahn, in order to have provided the first overhead stream is routed to heavies treated natural gas storage, as previously disclosed by Mehra, to store a stream of C2+ hydrocarbons (Cahn: stream 29; drawing; column 3, lines 47-56; Mehra: column 9, lines 63-65) before treating the stream (Cahn: column 5, lines 5-15; Mehra: column 9, lines 63-65).

Since the common technical features are previously disclosed by Cahn and Mehra, these common features are not special and so Groups I-II lack unity.