



(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**
McGreevy et al.

(10) **Pub. No.: US 2017/0020596 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: Jan. 26, 2017**

(54) **APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR RAPID RELIABLE ELECTROTHERMAL TISSUE FUSION AND SIMULTANEOUS CUTTING**

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC *A61B 18/085* (2013.01); *A61B 18/1442* (2013.01); *A61B 2018/00601* (2013.01)

(71) Applicant: **Conmed Corporation**, Utica, NY (US)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

(72) Inventors: **Francis T. McGreevy**, Aurora, CO (US); **Katherine R. Pavlovsky**, Denver, CO (US)

(73) Assignee: **Conmed Corporation**, Utica, NY (US)

A method of electrothermally fusing together pieces of tissue at an interface and simultaneously cutting the fused tissue along a linear path through the interface, including: compressing the tissue pieces together at the interface sufficiently for fusing the tissue pieces together and for cutting the fused tissue pieces in the linear path through the fused tissue at the interface; delivering an impulse of electrical power of no greater than 4.0 seconds time duration which contains sufficient energy to fuse the tissue pieces together at the interface and to simultaneously cut the fused tissue; converting the electrical power impulse into thermal energy applied at the interface; and regulating the temperature of the thermal energy applied at the interface in a range of 200° C. to 320° C. while fusing and simultaneously cutting the tissue pieces at the interface by controlling characteristics of the electrical power impulse.

(21) Appl. No.: **15/286,820**

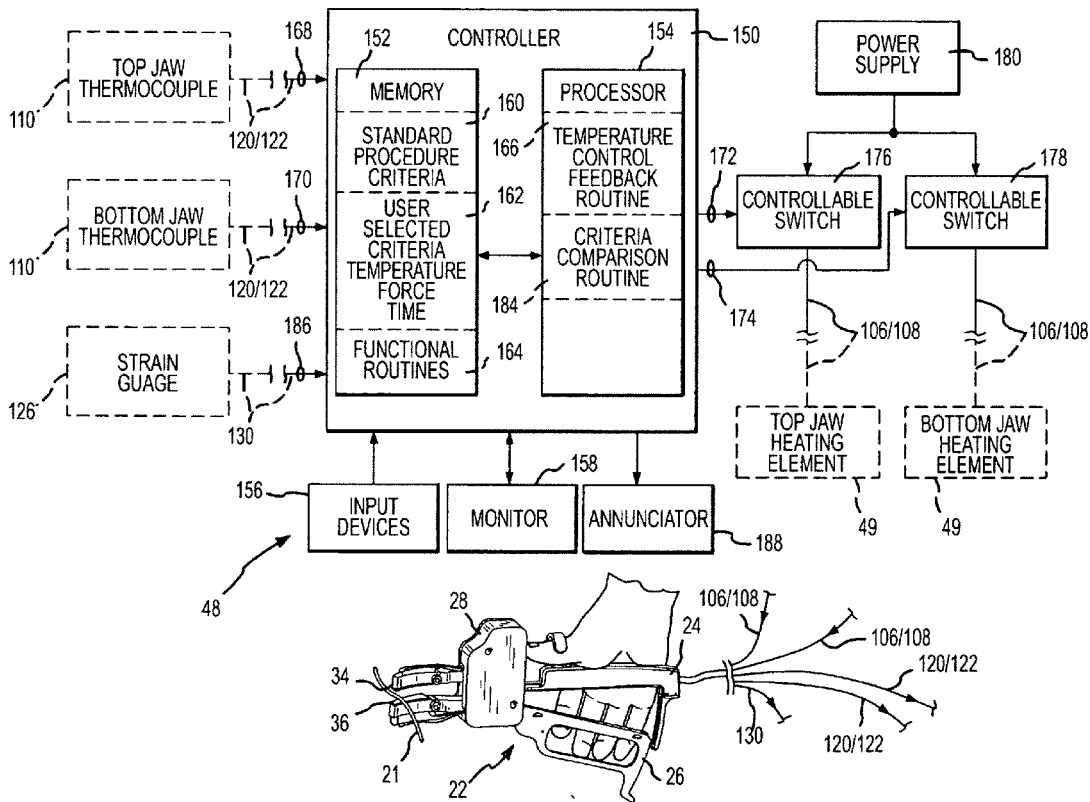
(22) Filed: **Oct. 6, 2016**

Related U.S. Application Data

(62) Division of application No. 11/701,884, filed on Feb. 1, 2007, now Pat. No. 9,498,277.

Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.**
A61B 18/08 (2006.01)
A61B 18/14 (2006.01)



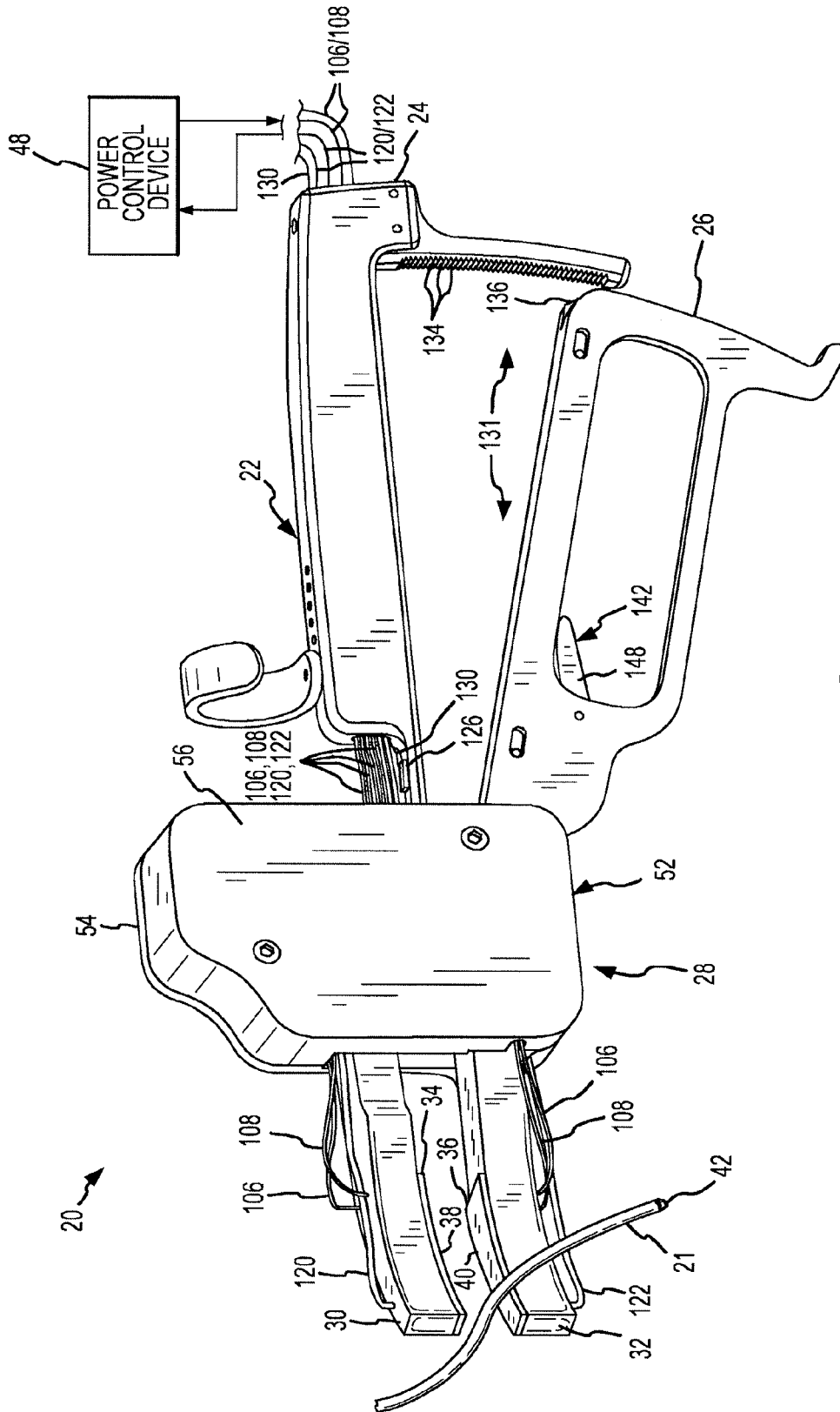


FIG. 1

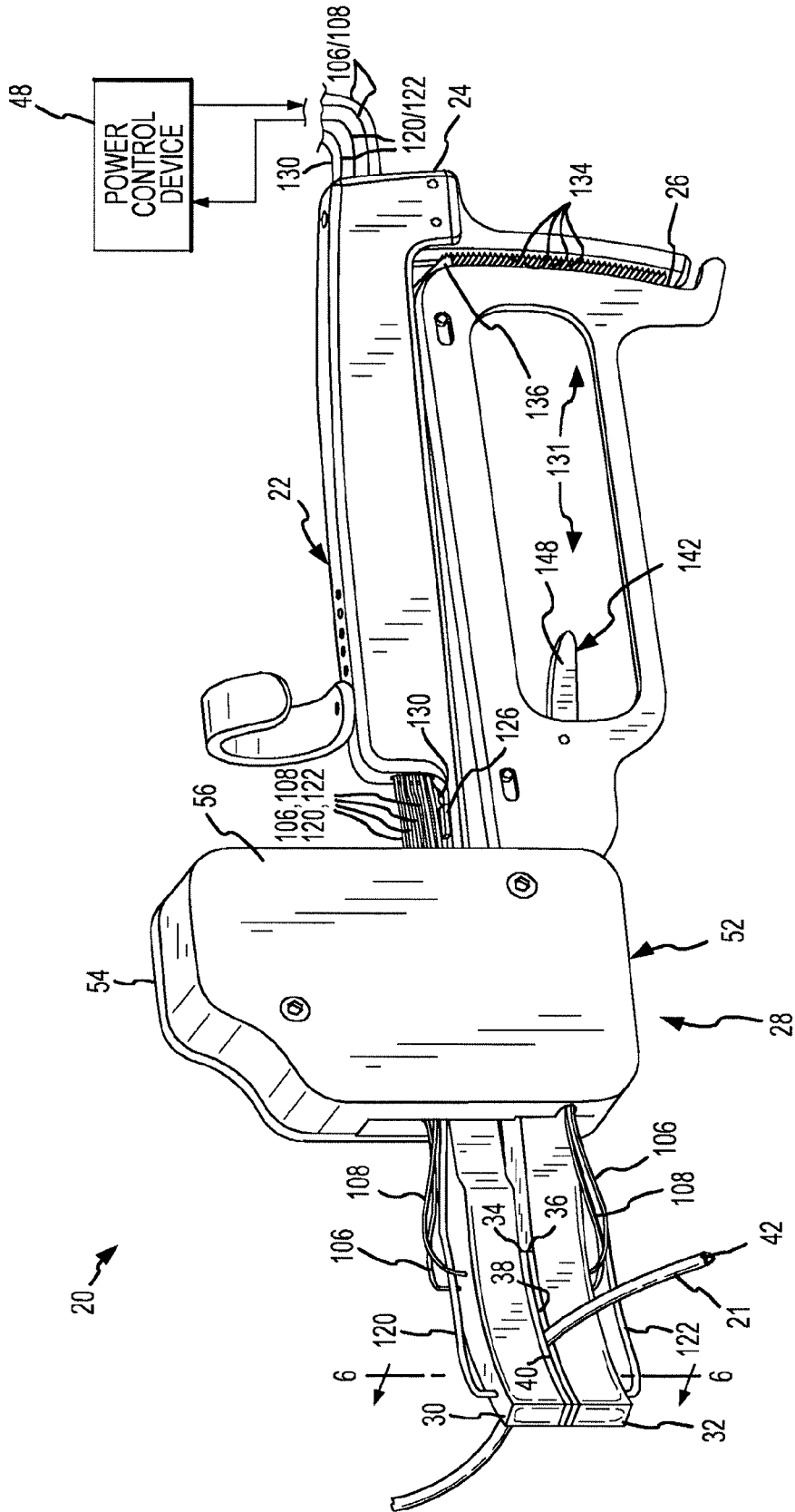


FIG. 2

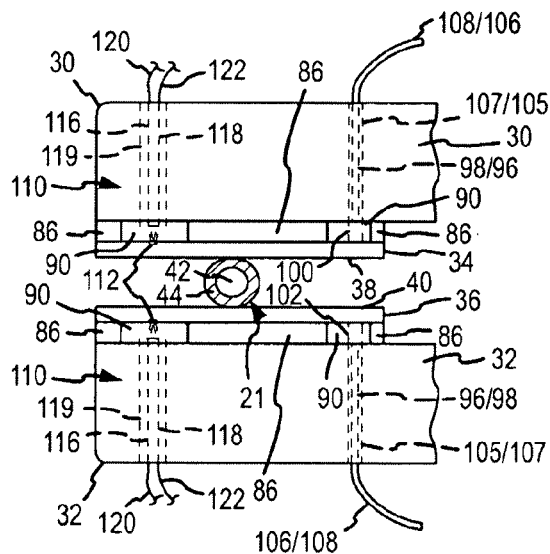


FIG.3

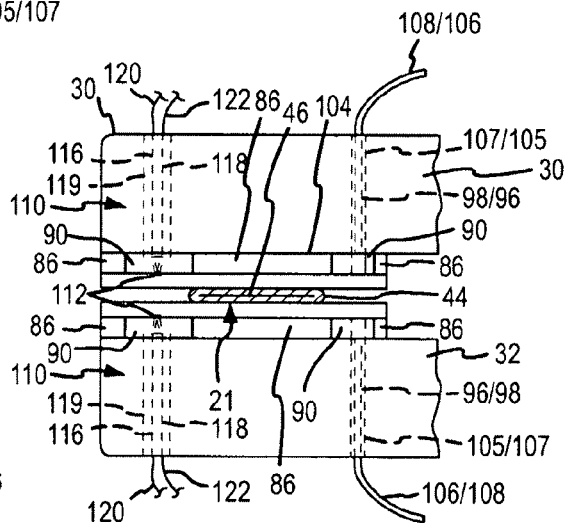


FIG.4

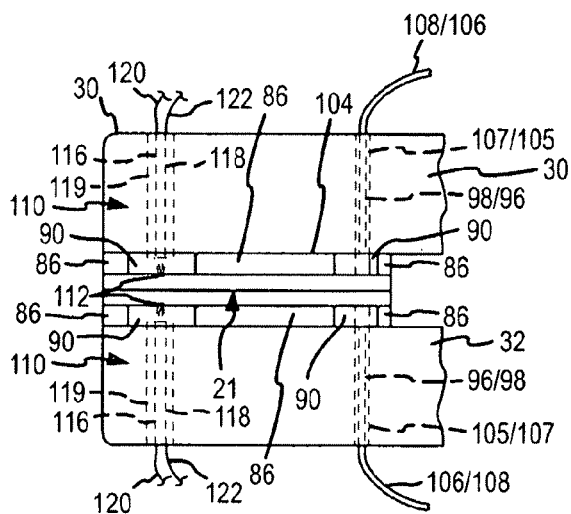


FIG.5

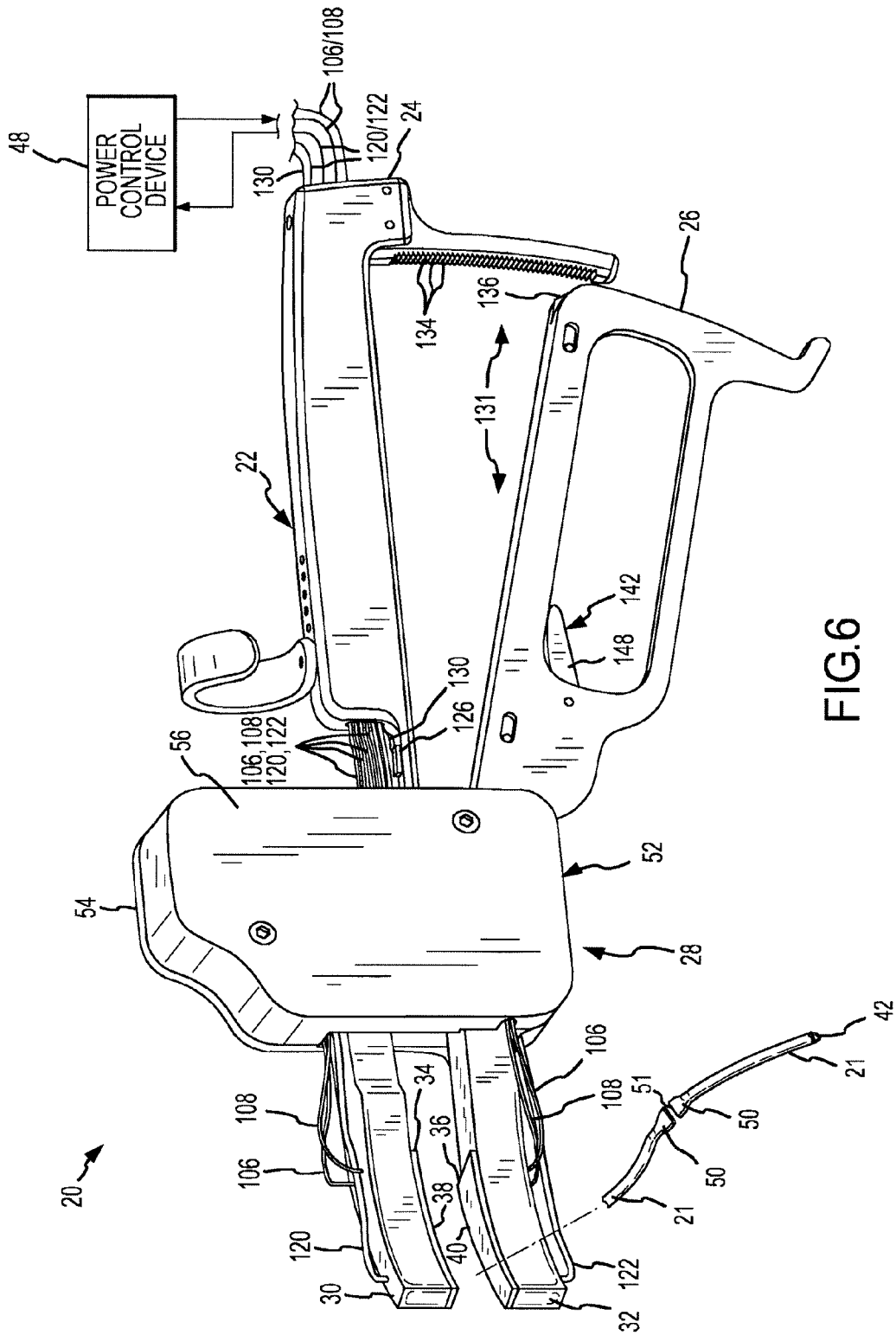


FIG. 6

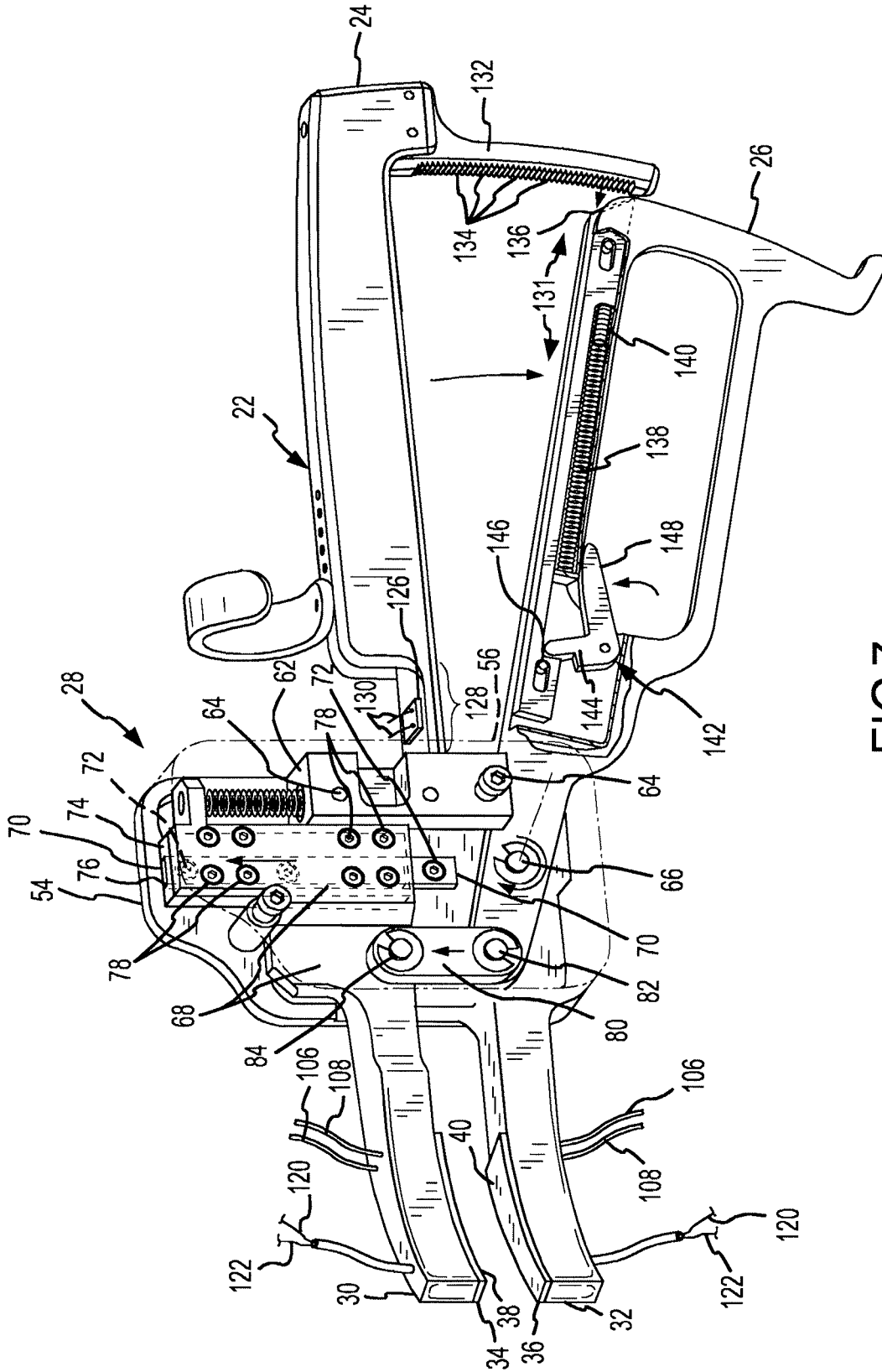


FIG.7

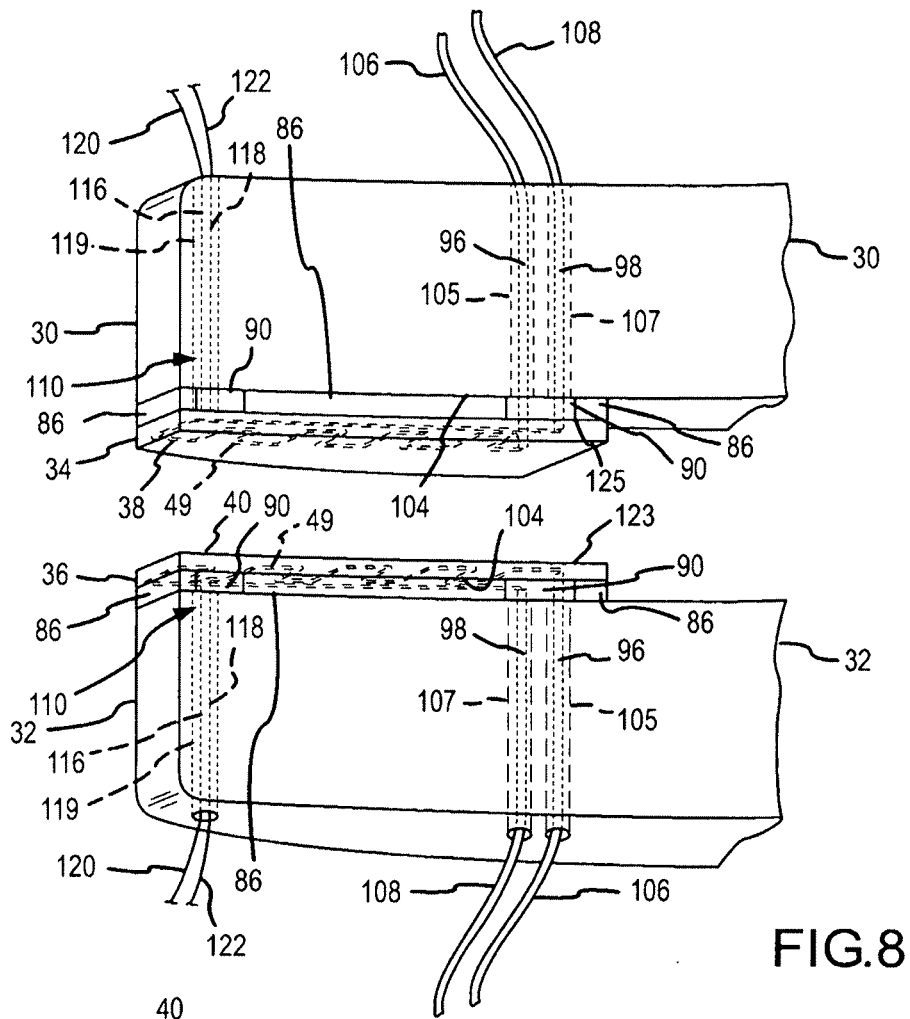


FIG. 8

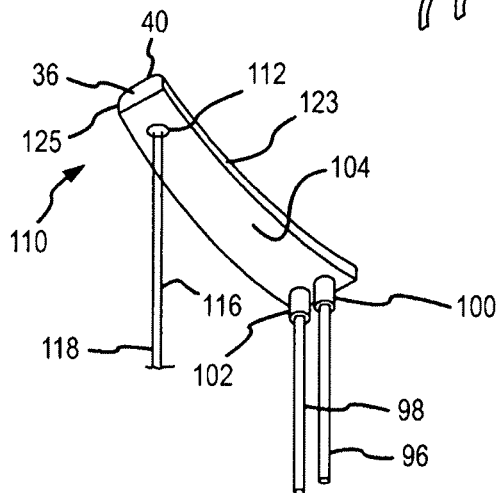


FIG. 9

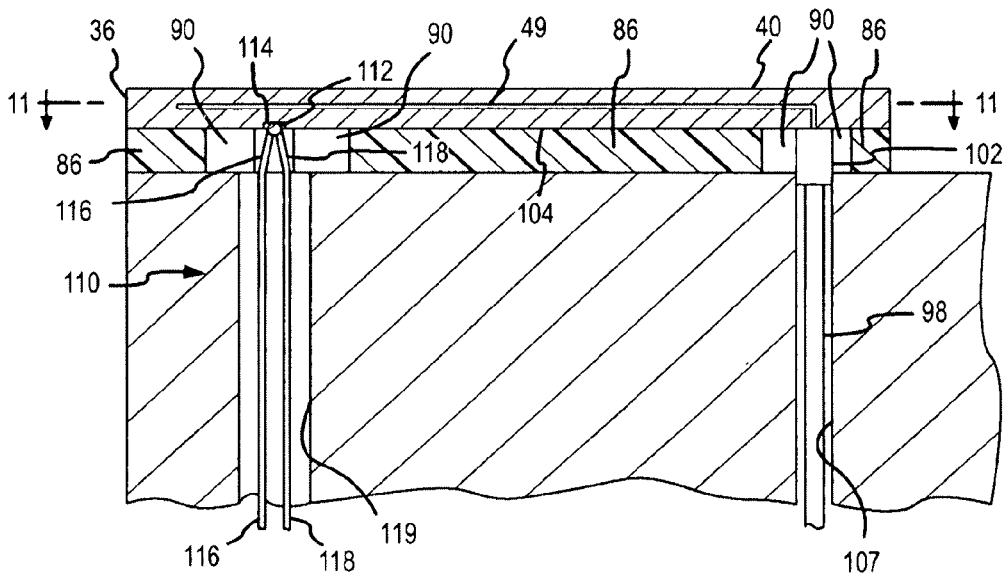


FIG. 10

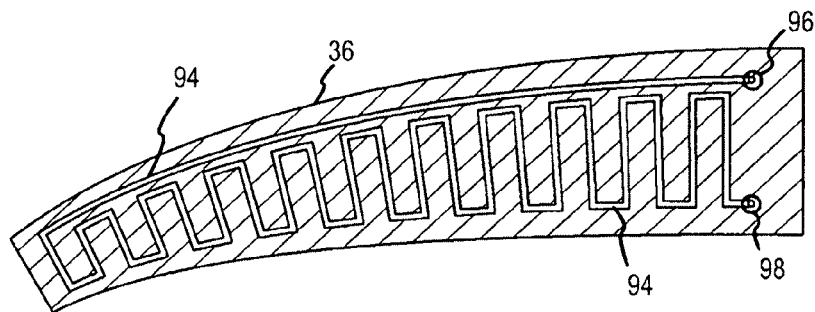


FIG. 11

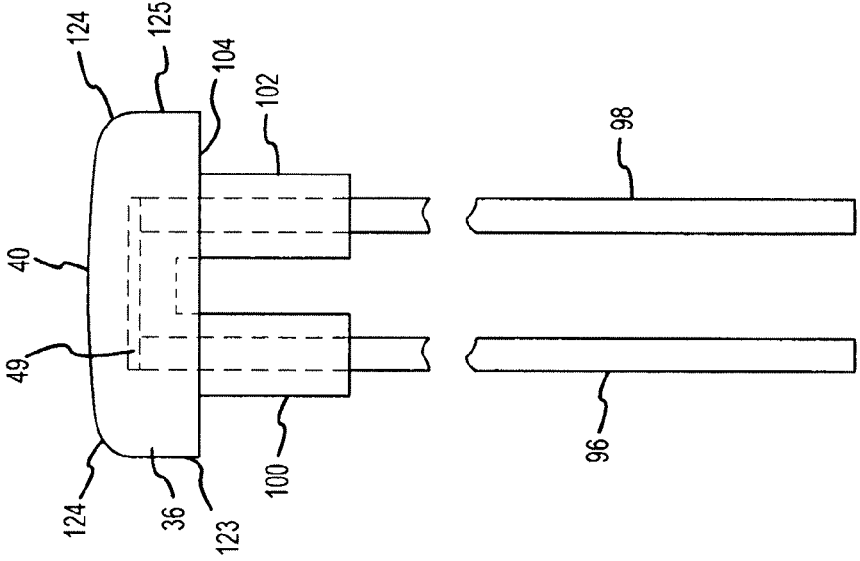


FIG.12

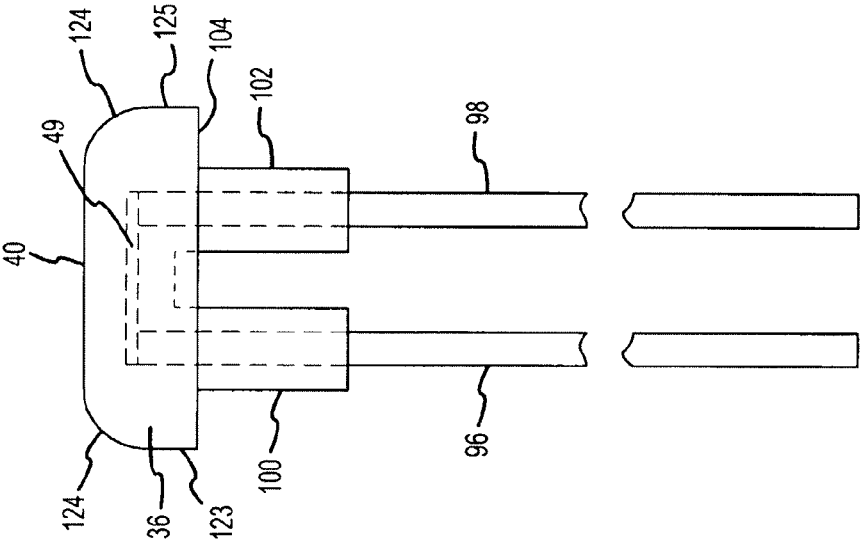


FIG.13

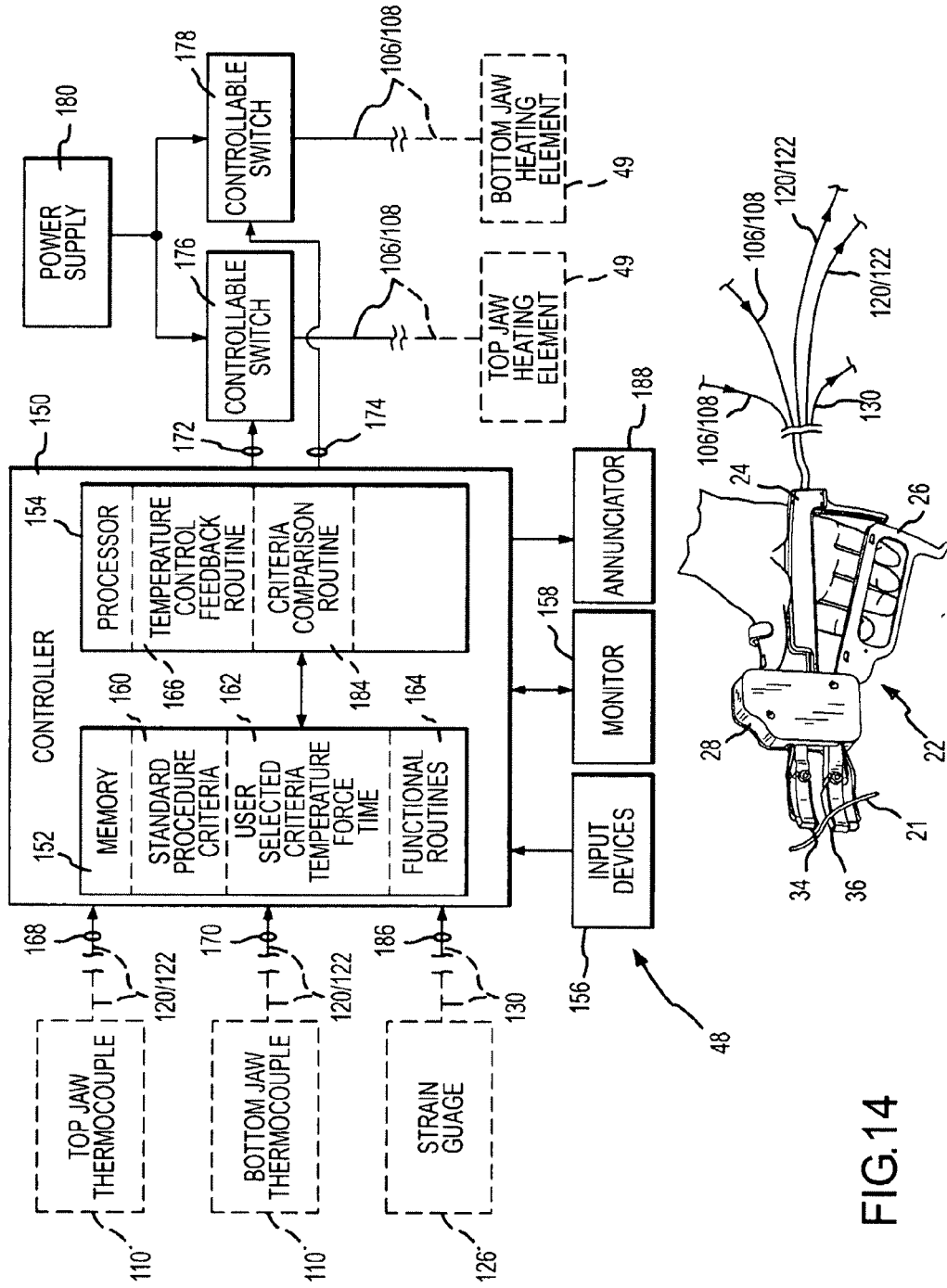


FIG. 14

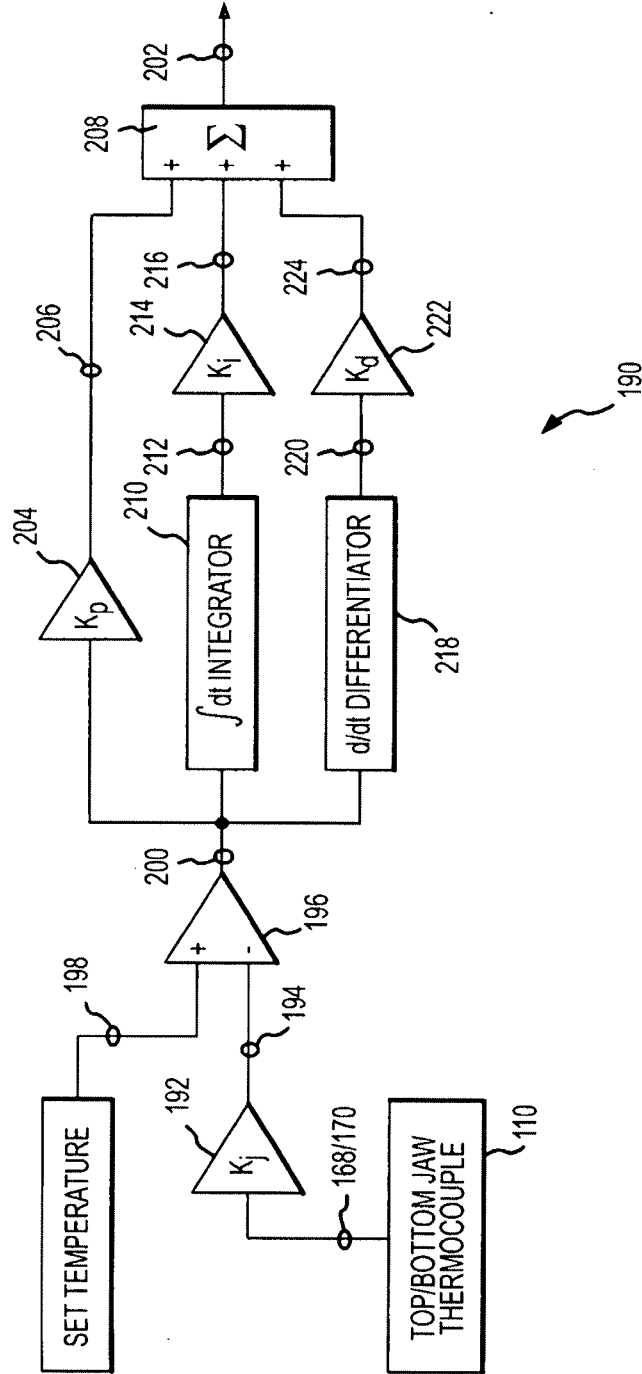


FIG.15

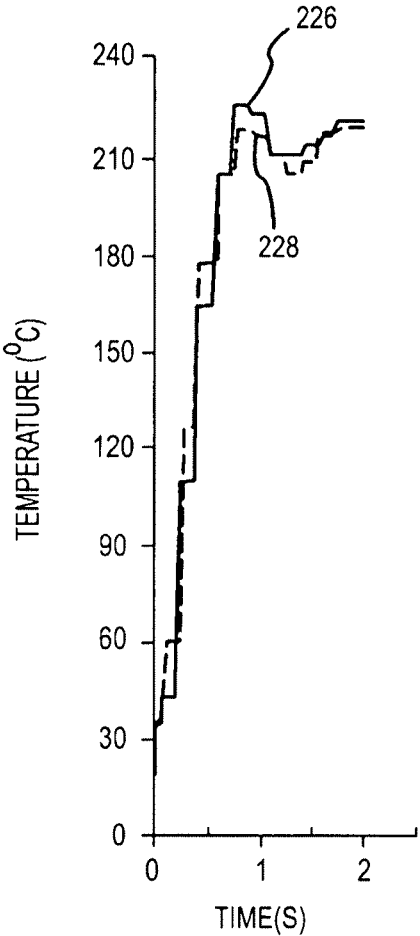


FIG. 16

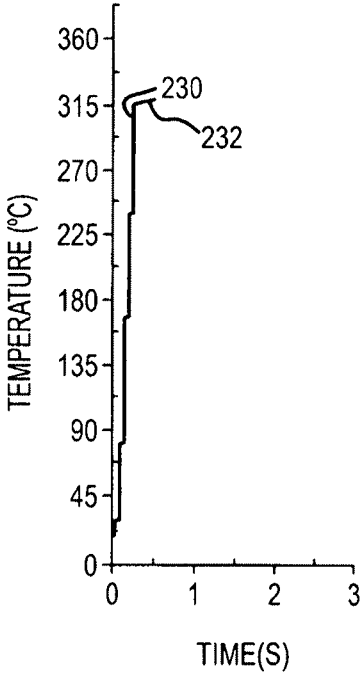
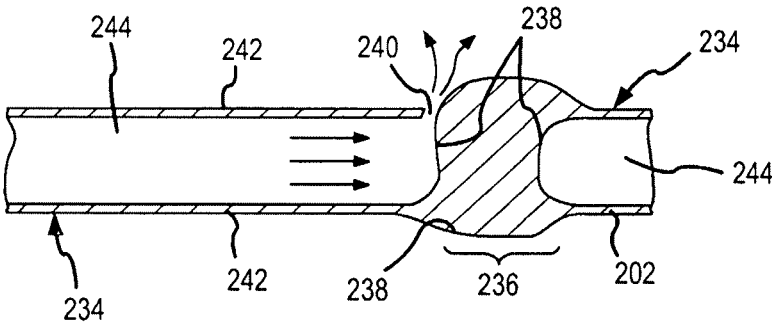
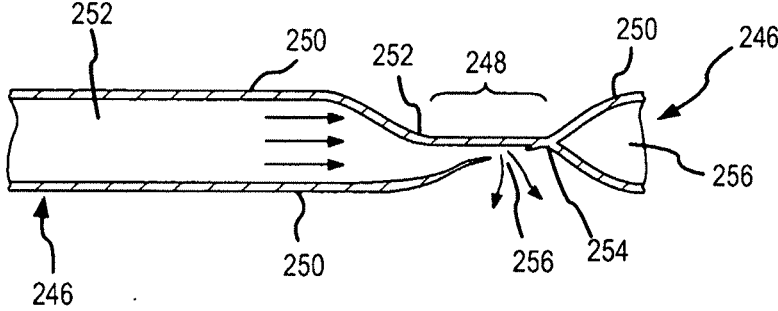


FIG. 17



PRIOR ART
FIG. 18



PRIOR ART
FIG. 19

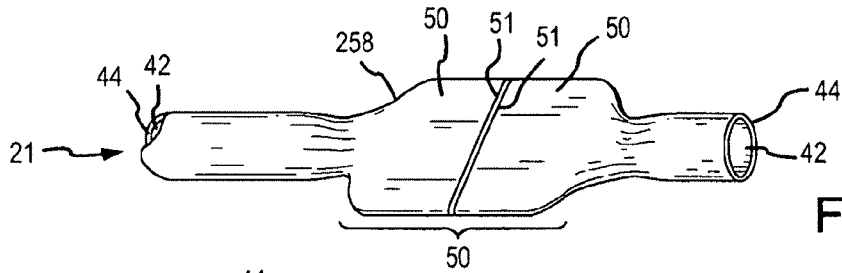


FIG. 20

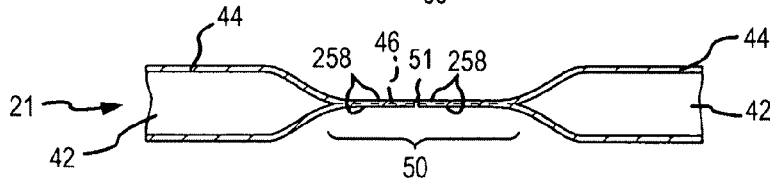


FIG. 21

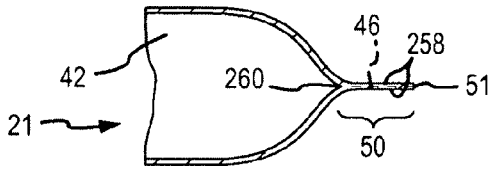


FIG. 22

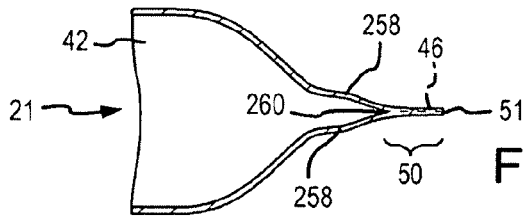


FIG. 23

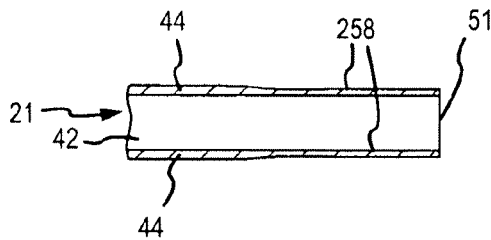
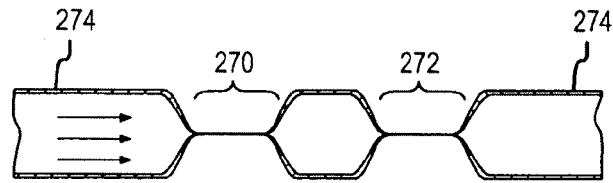
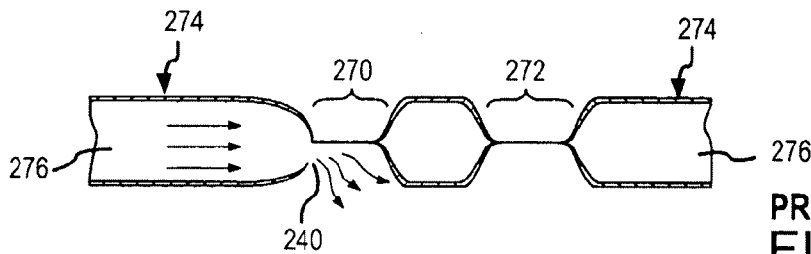


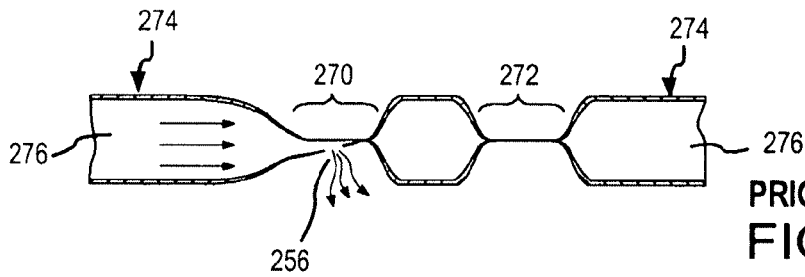
FIG. 24



PRIOR ART
FIG.25



PRIOR ART
FIG.26



PRIOR ART
FIG.27

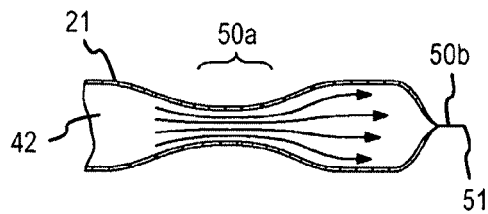


FIG.28

APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR RAPID RELIABLE ELECTROTHERMAL TISSUE FUSION AND SIMULTANEOUS CUTTING

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a divisional of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/701,884, filed on Feb. 1, 2007, the contents of which is relied upon and incorporated herein by reference in its entirety, and the benefit of priority under 35 U.S.C. §120 is hereby claimed. This application is related to inventions for an Apparatus and Method for Rapid and Reliable Electrothermal Tissue Fusion, described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/701,857, and for an Tissue Fusion Instrument and Method to Reduce the Adhesion of Tissue to its Working Surfaces, described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/701,858, both of which are assigned to the assignee of the present invention. The disclosures of these concurrently-filed U.S. patent applications are incorporated herein in their respective entireties by this reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] This invention relates to electrothermal tissue fusion, and more particularly, to a new and improved electrothermal apparatus and electrothermal method that seals or fuses tissue while simultaneously cutting or separating the tissue with the application of a short time-duration impulse of electrical energy which creates relatively high temperature heat that is applied to squeezed-together tissue pieces. The tissue sealing and simultaneous cutting occurs quickly, and the seal is of high integrity to resist failure while the cut results in a well-defined, substantially linear separation of the tissue through the sealed area.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Coaptive electrothermal tissue fusion or sealing involves the application of force and electrical energy to heat compressed tissue sufficiently to join together separate pieces of tissue. Electrothermal tissue fusion avoids the need to manually suture or tie-off tissues or vessels during a surgical procedure. The tissue is fused or sealed to prevent blood or other fluid loss so that thereafter the tissue may be cut or incised. Thus, the usual purpose of sealing or fusing tissue is to allow cutting of the tissue adjacent to the fused area during the surgical procedure.

[0004] In most cases, sealing the tissue and thereafter cutting the tissue adjacent to the sealed area is a desired and efficient way to perform a surgical procedure. Tissue cutting has therefore been combined with electrosurgical tissue fusion, in order to obtain efficiency and convenience. However, the tissue cutting is almost universally accomplished by use of a blade or other mechanical cutter rather than by cutting through the application of electrosurgical energy. The common types of mechanical tissue cutting devices have had the effect of compromising the effectiveness of the tissue seal or fusion. Without adequate tissue sealing or fusion, tissue cutting becomes substantially irrelevant because a failure to adequately seal or fuse the tissue offers no advantage over the typical manual procedures of suturing or tying off vessels or cutting tissue with a scalpel. Therefore, achieving and maintaining effective and reliable tissue fusion is a prerequisite to tissue cutting.

[0005] Although the exact details of the physical chemistry involved in tissue fusion are probably not completely understood, it is believed that the heat denatures chains or strands of tissue proteins in the separate pieces of tissue and the pressure causes the denatured protein chains to reconstitute or re-nature across the interface between the tissue pieces. The reconstituted proteins chains interact and intertwine with one another to hold the previously-separate tissues pieces together.

[0006] Collagen is one type of protein chain that appears to play an important role in tissue fusion. Collagen, also known as tropocollagen, consists of three polypeptide protein chains that form a triple helix. These protein chains are grouped or tangled together to establish significant tissue structure and strength, as is observed in blood vessels and ligaments. Applying heat to the tissue to raise the temperature to about 60-70° C. causes the protein chains to become disordered, disassociated, separated and untangled from the triple helix.

[0007] Elastin is another type of protein chain that appears to play an important role in tissue fusion. Elastin a collection of polypeptide protein chains that are individually and randomly cross-linked with each other to form a fibril. Fibrils are grouped or tangled together to form an elastin fiber. Upon the application of heat to raise the temperature to about 120° C., the elastin fiber becomes disassociated into a disordered collection of individual polypeptide chains, fibrils and fibers.

[0008] The heat which causes denaturation of the collagen and elastin chains also appears to create unfavorable molecular interactions among the components of the denatured proteins, resulting in a relatively high free energy state. Atoms with the same electrostatic charge, and hydrophobic and hydrophilic regions of the protein chains, begin to interact and create repulsive forces. Force must be applied at the interface between the tissue pieces during fusion to overcome the repulsive forces and to achieve more favorable interactions of the proteins chains thereby reducing the amount of free energy. Force must also be applied at the interface to maintain the denatured protein chains in physical proximity with each other so that they will reconstitute and join the tissue pieces together.

[0009] Although this theoretical model of tissue fusion is understandable, reliable tissue fusion is difficult to achieve on a consistent basis. Fusing blood vessels is of particular concern, because vessel fusion during a surgical procedure is the primary use of tissue fusion at the present time. Fused blood vessels that fail or leak after the conclusion of surgery lead to internal bleeding. Internal bleeding usually requires a second operation to gain access to and seal the leaking vessel, which induces further trauma and risk to the patient.

[0010] One prior art type of electrosurgical tissue fusion involves bipolar electrosurgery. The tissues are compressed between two jaws of a forceps-type instrument. The jaws also serve as electrodes to conduct high-voltage radio frequency (RF) current through the compressed tissue. Heat is generated from the RF current flowing through the resistance or impedance of the tissue, and that heat denatures the chains of protein.

[0011] Certain difficulties arise when using bipolar electrosurgical tissue fusion. The voltage between the jaws which compress the tissue and serve as electrodes is typically several thousand volts. The distance between the jaws is relatively small when the tissue is compressed. The

relatively high voltage can create arcs which jump the small distance between the jaws and penetrate the tissue adjacent to the jaws, particularly toward the end of the fusion procedure when the tissue between the jaws dehydrates and its impedance increases. The arcs enter the tissue in minuscule spots and destroy or weaken the tissue at those spots. Under conditions of prolonged application of RF power in this manner, which is typical with bipolar electro-surgical tissue fusion, the arcing can actually perforate the tissue adjacent to the fused area, thereby rupturing the tissue and destroying any sealing effect from the sealed area if there are a significant number of ruptures. This is particularly the case when sealing vessels, because a typical failure mode of vessels sealed with bipolar electro-surgery is a leak or rupture in the wall of the vessel adjacent to the sealed area.

[0012] The RF current inherently flows through the tissue in a somewhat random or uncontrollable pattern depending on the point-to-point characteristics of the tissue and many other factors. As a consequence, uniform heating of the tissue is impossible to control. The non-homogeneous distribution of heat over the area to be fused causes the protein chains to denature and reconstitute in a variable and non-uniform manner. The nonuniform denaturation and reconstitution leads to fused tissue areas of variable, nonuniform and somewhat unpredictable strength.

[0013] Assessing when to stop the delivery of RF current during bipolar electro-surgical tissue fusion is difficult. Applying either too much or too little RF current leads to seals that are more likely to fail. The application of too much RF current creates an excessive amount of heat which drives chemical reactions that appear to oxidize or burn the tissue and change the nature of the protein chains, thereby diminishing their ability to reconstitute and create effective seals. Overly-heated tissue at the sealed area or adjacent to the sealed area increases the probability of a failure because the tissue has become brittle and lacks pliability due to excessive dehydration, thereby contributing to cracking and breaking. In contrast, prematurely stopping the delivery of RF current prevents an adequate amount of denaturing of the protein chains which, in turn, prevents an adequate amount of reconstitution of the proteins chains, thereby diminishing the strength of the seal.

[0014] Control systems have been developed to attempt to address the problem of applying too much or too little RF power during bipolar electro-surgical tissue fusion. Such control systems monitor some event associated with the application of electrical power to the tissue, typically the impedance. Monitoring the tissue impedance is based on an expectation that some change indicates the occurrence of appropriate sealing conditions. However, it is believed that no reliable relationship exists between tissue impedance and the formation of a consistently reliable seal.

[0015] Another problem with bipolar electro-surgical tissue fusion is that the alternating aspects of the RF electrical energy inherently results in less energy application per unit of time. The alternating aspects of the RF energy application are by nature a pulsed or alternating current (AC) energy application, as opposed to a continual energy application. The tissue must withstand relatively high voltages, but the amount of power transferred is not commensurate with the high voltage due to the pulsed or AC application of the RF current. The effect of the pulsed or alternating RF energy application is that more time is required to transfer an equivalent amount of energy compared to the transfer of

energy delivered at a sustained peak value. The typical maximum power delivery with a widely used RF tissue fusion device is approximately 115 to 350 Watts per square inch (18-54 W/cm²).

[0016] Electrothermal instruments have also been used for tissue fusion. Electrothermal instruments have heating elements within jaws that grip and compress the tissue. Electrical current is conducted through the heating elements to generate the heat that is applied to the compressed tissue. As with bipolar electro-surgery, previous electrothermal instruments have produced varying and inconsistent tissue fusion results, possibly as a result of an ineffective control system or control functionality based on misperceptions relating to tissue fusion physiology, including the perceived limitation of not heating the tissue above the 120° C. point where elastin protein chains denature. The prevalent view is to avoid elevating the temperature of the tissue beyond the 120° C. point where elastin protein chains denature, because it is believed that temperatures beyond that point are destructive to the proteins chains. Consequently, all presently known tissue fusion technologies attempt to limit the tissue temperature to no more than approximately 120° C., and many tissue fusion technologies limit the temperature of the tissue to approximately 100° C. to avoid creating steam.

[0017] The typical approach used to combine tissue cutting and fusion is to incorporate a mechanical blade with the applicator of the RF or thermal energy. The electrodes of the RF applicator, or jaws of the electrothermal applicator, create the fusion. Once the fusion is complete, the blade is advanced in grooves or slots formed in the electrodes or jaws to sever the fused area of the tissue, usually while the electrodes or jaws maintain pressure on the tissue. Such mechanical cutting systems are prone to sticking or jamming. Usually the mechanical blade is relatively thin and therefore has a tendency to distort while cutting, which may cause friction and sticking as it advances in the grooves or slots. The fluid and small pieces of tissue at the surgical site may also interfere with the intended movement of the mechanical blade.

[0018] The mechanical action of the blade severing the fused area of tissue also has the tendency to induce forces on the sealed area and the adjacent tissue, which typically compromises the effectiveness of the seal. Advancing the mechanical blade through the sealed area can separate the sealed area sufficiently to create a fluid leak and may even crack or otherwise destroy the sealed area to create a fluid leak. In certain circumstances, the mechanical blade can become so stuck or jammed to prevent release of the tissue from between the electrodes or jaws. Such a circumstance is particularly serious in minimally invasive (endoscopic or laparoscopic) surgery because the closed minimally invasive procedure has to be converted to an open surgical procedure to gain access to the stuck applicator and release it from the tissue. Converting a closed minimally invasive surgical procedure to an open procedure induces substantial unexpected trauma on a patient, and unexpectedly prolongs the duration and risk associated with the surgical procedure.

[0019] A further disadvantage of mechanical cutting is that the blade must be advanced in a linear direction, making it impossible to cut on a curve. Many surgeons prefer to use instruments which are curved, particularly in minimally invasive procedures where visualization is difficult because of a lack of stereoscopic vision. A curved electrode or jaw

is easier to observe from the monoscopic perspective of minimally invasive surgical procedures.

[0020] Attempts have been made to electrothermally cut tissue simultaneously while fusing the tissue, but all such known attempts have proved unsuccessful or impractical. In general, tissue cutting while simultaneously fusing the tissue has involved delivering energy into the tissue for a considerable length of time. The prolonged energy delivery has apparently heated the tissue to the point where essentially complete dehydration of the tissue occurs and causes the tissue to become crisp, brittle and friable, like a potato chip. The tissue simply reaches a point where the sealed area disintegrates or crumbles.

[0021] Such prolonged heating has the effect of inducing thermal spread into the adjacent tissue, which compromises the strength of the seal and the unsealed adjacent tissue areas. The brittleness of the tissue causes it to separate or crack in a non-defined or non-controllable manner, which may extend the crack to the adjacent tissue walls and compromise or destroy the seal and create a leak. Moreover, the separation through the sealed area is essentially non-defined because of the relatively large area of total dehydration and the inability to control where the dehydrated tissue will crack or disintegrate. Consequently, known tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting procedures result in cutting which is more of the nature of ill-defined tissue obliteration rather than linear cutting along a desired path which surgeons prefer in order to avoid damaging more tissue than is necessary during the overall surgical procedure.

[0022] Although the principal concern of tissue fusion and cutting in a single procedure is creating reliable seals that hold on a long-term basis, another very important practical consideration is an ability to create the seal and perform the cut quickly. A typical surgical procedure will involve sealing many blood vessels at the surgical site. The typical time required by known electrosurgical tissue sealing devices to create a single seal is about 5-12 seconds. When also simultaneously electrothermally cutting the tissue in the manner described, the entire energy application extends from 30 to 60 seconds. When mechanically cutting the tissue after it has been fused, an additional 5 to 10 seconds is required in order to advance the mechanical blade through the fused area, providing that no sticking or jamming occurs. A considerable amount of time is therefore consumed in making each single-procedure seal and cut. Considering that a typical surgical procedure may require sealing and cutting scores of vessels, a considerable amount of the total overall surgical procedure time is consumed by vessel sealing and cutting.

[0023] Moreover, because of concern about the reliability of the vessel seals, the typical practice is to create two sequential seals at each severed end of the vessel. The theory is that if the first or upstream seal fails, the second or downstream seal becomes a redundant backup to prevent fluid leakage. The time to create the primary and backup seals is more than twice the amount of time required to create a single seal when the time for repositioning and observing the quality of each seal is taken into account. Further still, double seals must be made at both ends of each severed vessel if there is concern about leaking from the seals created at opposite ends of the vessel which is cut. Thus, a considerable amount of time is consumed during the surgical procedure by sealing vessels and cutting them. The time consumed by cutting and sealing vessels extends the

time required to accomplish the entire surgical procedure, or alternatively, detracts from the time available to accomplish other activities during the surgical procedure.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0024] The present invention creates reliable seals of good integrity while simultaneously cutting the tissue, and does so in a considerably shorter amount of time than known single-procedure tissue sealing and mechanical cutting techniques or known tissue sealing and simultaneous cutting techniques. The present invention delivers a short impulse of a relatively high amount of electrical energy to create the heat applied to fuse or seal the tissue while simultaneously cutting the fused tissue. Creating a reliable seal having good structural integrity while simultaneously cutting the seal is achieved with an electrical power impulse having a typical duration of about 2.0 or less seconds, and in many cases about 1.5 seconds or less. In certain exaggerated circumstances, a time duration of the electrical power impulse may extend to about 4.0 seconds, but this circumstance is unusual. The amount of energy delivered is sufficient to elevate the jaw temperature at the interface between the sealed and cut tissues to between 220° C. and 320° C. The relatively short time duration of the energy impulse and the resulting high temperature quickly create an effective, reliable and consistent seal followed by severing the tissue along a well-defined path through the sealed area.

[0025] Cutting or separation of the tissue occurs along a well-defined separation or parting line or path that may be linear in a straight or slightly curved sense. The separation line is established by the configuration of the jaws which grasp and compress the tissue during sealing and simultaneous cutting. The linear nature of the separation path or parting line is displaced sufficiently from the adjoining fused tissue areas to avoid compromising the strength or integrity of the adjoining fused areas. The separation or parting is accomplished simultaneously with the tissue fusion, so adverse forces on a previously-formed fused tissue area are avoided, thereby avoiding the problem of weakening the integrity of the sealed area by subsequent cutting.

[0026] The short time duration of the high temperature application does not affect the ability of the protein chains to renature and thereafter reconstitute in a strong reliable bond, even though the temperature created is considerably higher than the typically-regarded appropriate temperature for tissue fusion. The short impulse of relatively high heat is believed to effectively dehydrate or desiccate polar water molecules from binding sites on the protein chains without so dehydrating the tissue as to substantially compromise its pliability, thereby permitting more and direct interactions between the protein chains at those binding sites, resulting in stronger direct interactions between the protein chains, increased affinity between the chains and increased strength of the fusion between the tissues at the interface. However, the short impulse of energy does not so dehydrate the sealed tissue to cause it to lose its pliability and strength and thereby contribute to a leak or seal failure. The cutting occurs while the tissue is sealed and remains slightly pliable, thereby facilitating well-defined separation while avoiding adverse forces on the sealed tissue areas that might negatively affect the strength of the seal.

[0027] The seal and simultaneous cut created by the relatively short impulse of high energy become effective immediately, allowing the compression force on the tissue to

be released almost immediately after delivering impulse of energy, without requiring a cooling-off time period. The short amount of time required to create the simultaneous cut and seal, and the avoidance of a subsequent cooling-off period or a mechanical cutting time period, greatly diminish the amount of time required to complete each simultaneous cut and seal procedure.

[0028] The quick delivery of energy forms an effective seal without significantly destroying, cracking or substantially adversely affecting the strength of the tissue adjacent to the seal along the separation line where the cut occurs. Consequently, the sealed and other tissue adjacent to the separation line retains its natural strength and is unlikely to fail, unlike the typical prior art electrosurgical tissue sealing and cutting procedure which spreads considerable thermal energy to the adjoining tissue. The thermal spread to the adjoining tissue is believed to destroy or diminish the strength of the adjacent tissue and the sealed area, making them susceptible to rupture from physiological pressure and from mechanical severing.

[0029] The sealed areas have a consistent strength which is significantly greater than the normal physiological pressure applied on the sealed areas. The strength and integrity minimizes or virtually eliminates post-operative bleeding. The reliability and integrity of the seals diminishes or eliminates the need for double seals for redundancy purposes. However, under circumstances where double seals are preferred, the characteristics of the seal created assure that a failure of the primary upstream seal will still confine the fluid to the vessel so that the redundant downstream seal will have the opportunity to function as an effective backup.

[0030] In accordance with these and other features, one aspect of the invention is an apparatus for fusing together pieces of tissue at an interface and simultaneously cutting the fused tissue along a linear path through the interface. The apparatus comprises an instrument and a power control device. The instrument includes jaws with working surfaces and a movement mechanism which moves the jaws toward one another to compress the tissue pieces together at the interface between the working surfaces. The working surfaces are formed of ceramic material and have a smoothness defined by an Ra of 0.40 microns or less. The movement mechanism has a capability for transferring sufficient force to achieve a compressed tissue thickness sufficient to fuse the tissue pieces at the interface, which in the case of blood vessels is 0.05 mm to 0.10 mm, followed by further compressing the tissue pieces at the interface to a zero thickness to cut the fused together tissue pieces. The power control device delivers an impulse of electrical power to the jaws which contains sufficient energy to fuse and simultaneously cut the tissue pieces along the linear path at the interface within no greater than 4.0 seconds after the electrical power impulse is initiated. The power impulse creates thermal energy and maintains a temperature of the thermal energy applied to the interface in the range of 220° C. to 320° C.

[0031] Another aspect of the invention is an apparatus for fusing together pieces of tissue at an interface and simultaneously cutting the fused tissue along a linear path through the interface. The apparatus comprises an instrument and a power control device. The instrument includes jaws with working surfaces and a movement mechanism which moves the jaws toward one another to compress the tissue pieces together and to obtain a zero separation distance between the working surfaces of the jaws to simultaneously cut the

compressed and fused tissue pieces along the linear path. The power control device delivers an impulse of electrical power to the jaws which contains sufficient energy to fuse the tissue pieces together and to simultaneously cut the fused tissue pieces at the interface by creating a temperature applied to the interface in the range of 220° C. to 320° C. within the time duration of the electrical power impulse.

[0032] A further aspect of the invention is a method of electrothermally fusing together pieces of tissue at an interface and simultaneously cutting the fused tissue along a linear path through the interface. The method involves compressing the tissue pieces together at the interface sufficiently for fusing the tissue pieces together and for cutting the fused tissue pieces in the linear path through the fused tissue at the interface, delivering an impulse of electrical power of no greater than 4.0 seconds time duration which contains sufficient energy to fuse the tissue pieces together at the interface and to simultaneously cut the fused tissue in a linear path through the fused tissue at the interface within the time duration of the electrical impulse, converting the electrical power impulse into thermal energy applied at the interface to fuse the tissue pieces and to simultaneously cut the fused tissue pieces in the linear path through the interface, and regulating the temperature of the thermal energy applied at the interface in a range of 220° C. to 320° C. while fusing and simultaneously cutting the tissue pieces at the interface by controlling characteristics of the electrical power impulse.

[0033] Preferably, the time duration of the electrical power impulse is no greater than 2.0 seconds. The invention is particularly applicable to fusing apposite walls of a vessel to form an occlusion in a lumen of the vessel while simultaneously cutting the vessel.

[0034] Certain further aspects of the invention involve one or more of the following features: releasing the interface immediately after termination of the electrical power impulse, elevating the temperature of the thermal energy applied at the compressed interface at a rate of between 150° C. per second to 500° C. per second from energy contained in the electrical power impulse, producing an energy density in the range of 388 W per square centimeter to 465 W per square centimeter of area of the compressed interface from the electrical power impulse, forming electrical power impulse from direct current and conducting the direct current power impulse to a heating element within each jaw, releasing compression of the interface after fusion and simultaneous cutting by moving the working surfaces away from the fused and cut interface with the working surfaces extending parallel to one another, releasing compression of the interface without inducing shear forces on the fused and cut interface, and separately regulating characteristics of the electrical power impulse delivered to the heating element within each jaw to regulate the temperature of thermal energy applied by the working surface from each jaw separately.

[0035] A more complete appreciation of the present disclosure and its scope, and the manner in which it achieves the above and other improvements, can be obtained by reference to the following detailed description of presently preferred embodiments taken in connection with the accompanying drawings, which are briefly summarized below, and to the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0036] FIG. 1 is an illustration of an electrothermal tissue fusion or sealing and simultaneous cutting or separation apparatus which incorporates the present invention and which comprises a tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting instrument, shown in a perspective view, and a power control device, shown in block diagram form, which are used to seal and simultaneously cut a vessel, shown in perspective.

[0037] FIG. 2 is an illustration of the use of the tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting apparatus shown in FIG. 1 to fuse and cut a vessel.

[0038] FIG. 3 is an enlarged side elevational view of distal arms and jaws of the instrument and a cross-sectional view of the vessel shown in FIG. 1, before compressing the vessel when fusing and simultaneously cutting it.

[0039] FIG. 4 is a view similar to FIG. 3, showing compression and fusion of the vessel.

[0040] FIG. 5 is a view similar to FIG. 4, showing separation of the vessel after it has been fused.

[0041] FIG. 6 is a perspective view of the tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting apparatus shown in FIG. 1 after the vessel has been fused and cut as shown in FIGS. 4 and 5.

[0042] FIG. 7 is a perspective view of the tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting instrument shown in FIGS. 1, 2 and 6, with portions broken away to show internal details of a parallel jaw movement mechanism and a handle locking and release mechanism, and with certain electrical conductors shown broken away.

[0043] FIG. 8 is an enlarged partial perspective view of top and bottom distal arms and top and bottom jaws of the instrument shown in FIGS. 1-7.

[0044] FIG. 9 is a perspective view of a bottom jaw shown in FIG. 8.

[0045] FIG. 10 is an enlarged longitudinal and vertical cross-sectional view of the bottom jaw shown in FIG. 8.

[0046] FIG. 11 is a transverse cross-sectional view of the bottom jaw shown in FIG. 10, taken substantially in the plane of line 11-11 shown in FIG. 10, and illustrating a heating element embedded in the bottom jaw.

[0047] FIG. 12 is an end elevational view of one form of the working surface of the bottom jaw shown in FIG. 9.

[0048] FIG. 13 is an end elevational view of another form of the working surface of the bottom jaw shown in FIG. 12, which is an alternative to that shown in FIG. 12.

[0049] FIG. 14 is a more detailed block diagram of the power control device shown in FIG. 1, showing in block form certain aspects of the tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting instrument shown in block diagram form in FIG. 1.

[0050] FIG. 15 is a block diagram illustrating the functionality of a temperature control feedback routine executed by a processor of a controller of the power control device shown in FIG. 14.

[0051] FIG. 16 is a graph of temperature versus time illustrating the temperature of jaws of the tissue fusion instrument when sealing a vessel with a 2.0 second time-duration impulse of electrical energy.

[0052] FIG. 17 is a graph similar to FIG. 16, illustrating the temperature of the jaws of the tissue fusion instrument when sealing a different vessel with a 1.5 second time-duration impulse of electrical energy.

[0053] FIG. 18 is a longitudinal cross-sectional view of a partial vessel which has been sealed with a prior art technique, viewed orthogonal to a flat surface of the sealed area of the vessel, illustrating an edge-seal leak.

[0054] FIG. 19 is a longitudinal cross-sectional view of a partial vessel which has been sealed with a prior art technique, viewed parallel to flat surfaces of the sealed area of the vessel, illustrating a mid-seal wall leak.

[0055] FIG. 20 is an enlarged partial perspective view of sealed areas of a vessel created as shown in FIGS. 4 and 5.

[0056] FIG. 21 is a longitudinal cross-sectional view of the partial vessel shown in Fig., taken in a plane substantially perpendicular to a flat surface of the sealed areas.

[0057] FIG. 22 is a longitudinal cross-sectional view of the partial vessel shown in FIG. 21 with increased fluid pressure applied in the vessel on a left-hand side sealed area.

[0058] FIG. 23 is a longitudinal cross-sectional view of the partial vessel shown in FIG. 21 with greater fluid pressure applied in the vessel on the left-hand side sealed area and illustrating initiation of mid-seal separation of the sealed area.

[0059] FIG. 24 is a longitudinal cross-sectional view of the partial vessel shown in FIG. 23 illustrating complete mid-seal separation of the sealed area.

[0060] FIG. 25 is an enlarged partial longitudinal cross-sectional view of a vessel, illustrating two prior art longitudinally-spaced sealed areas.

[0061] FIG. 26 is a longitudinal cross-sectional view similar to FIG. 25, illustrating a prior art edge-seal leak also shown in FIG. 18.

[0062] FIG. 27 is a longitudinal cross-sectional view similar to FIG. 25, illustrating a prior art mid-seal wall leak also shown in FIG. 19.

[0063] FIG. 28 is a longitudinal cross-sectional view related to FIG. 25, illustrating a mid-seal separation, also shown in FIGS. 23 and 24, of a first one of two sequential sealed areas in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0064] The present invention is incorporated in an electrothermal apparatus 20 shown in FIG. 1. The electrothermal apparatus 20 is used to fuse or seal biological tissue, such as a vessel 21, while simultaneously cutting or separating the biological tissue, by use of a handpiece or tissue fusion and cutting instrument 22. Proximal handles 24 and 26 of the instrument 22 are moved or squeezed together, which causes a parallel movement mechanism 28 (FIG. 7) of the instrument 22 to move distal arms 30 and 32 of the instrument 22 toward one another with parallel closing movement. Jaws 34 and 36 are attached to the distal end of the arms 30 and 32. Working surfaces 38 and 40 of the jaws 34 and 36 contact, squeeze, force and compress the vessel 21 when the jaws 38 and 40 and the distal arms 30 and 32 move toward one another, as shown in FIG. 2. Before compression, a lumen 42 within the vessel 21 is unobstructed and not occluded as shown in FIG. 3. Movement of the jaws 34 and 36 toward one another forces and compresses walls 44 of the vessel 21 into apposition with one another at a tissue interface 46 shown in FIG. 4.

[0065] An impulse of electrical energy from a power control device 48, shown in FIGS. 1 and 2, is delivered to a heating element 49 (FIGS. 8 and 10-13) embedded in each of the jaws 34 and 36, upon compressing together the apposite walls 44 of the vessel 21 at the tissue interface 46. The heating element 49 converts the electrical power to heat, and the heat is conducted from the working surfaces 38 and

40 to elevate the temperature of the compressed apposite vessel walls **44** at the interface **46**. The temperature of the vessel walls **44** is elevated to a predetermined set point temperature within the range of 220° C. to 320° C. where tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting occurs while the jaws **34** and **36** compress the apposite vessel walls **44** against one another until the working surfaces **38** and **40** contact one another and thereby sever or cut the sealed vessel walls **44** at a well-defined line along the longitudinal dimension of the working surfaces **38** and **40**. The force applied from the working surfaces **38** and **40** in contact with the apposite vessel walls **44** is sufficient to squeeze the fully compressed and heated apposite vessel walls until an essentially zero dimension gap, i.e. complete contact, between the working surfaces **38** and **40** of the jaws **34** and **36**, respectively, is achieved. This force required to achieve an essentially zero space or gap between the working surfaces is usually greater than 150 Newtons (N), but may fall within the range of 110 N to 150 N.

[0066] The heat first denatures and disassociates the protein chains at the interface **46** of the compressed apposite vessel walls **44** at the interface **46**. The denatured protein chains immediately reconstitute or re-nature across the compressed tissue interface **46** to fuse or seal the vessel walls **44** together at a sealed area **50** (FIGS. 6 and 20). The sealed area **50** occludes the lumen **42** and prevents fluid normally confined within the lumen **42** from passing from the vessel **21**. Continued compression further squeezes the sealed area **50** until the heat essentially destroys the tissue in a well-defined separation line **51** through the sealed area **50** and causes the vessel **21** to separate or part at the separation line **51** (FIGS. 6 and 20). Immediately after the impulse of electrical power is terminated, the handles **24** and **26** are moved away from one another, which causes the arms **30** and **32** and the attached to jaws **34** and **36** to separate, releasing the vessel **21** which has been cut or severed at the parting or separation line **51**, as shown in FIGS. 6 and 20. The tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting procedure is typically complete in 1.5 to 2.0 seconds.

[0067] The heat is disbursed substantially uniformly throughout the jaws **34** and **36** and across the compressed tissue interface **46** (FIG. 4) at the sealed area **50**. The tissue walls **44** are continually compressed until a zero gap or contact is achieved between the working surfaces **38** and **40**. The heat and the continued compression destroys the-tissue in a well-defined linear manner between the working surfaces **38** and **40** at the separation line **51** to separate the vessel **21** after it has been sealed and occluded in the sealed areas **50** adjoining the separation line **51**.

[0068] The jaws **34** and **36** are formed of high thermal conductivity material, preferably ceramic material such as aluminum nitride, thereby achieving a substantially uniform temperature on the tissue squeezed between the working surfaces **38** and **40**. The tissue interface temperature is approximately equal to the temperature of the jaws **34** and **36** due to the relatively thin amount of tissue compressed between the jaws.

[0069] The working surfaces **38** and **40** of the jaws **34** and **36** are smoothed or polished, preferably to an, Ra of less than 0.15 microns. Jaws with working surfaces which have this degree of smoothness prevent the tissue from sticking to the jaws during fusion, despite the high relatively high temperature of the jaws against the tissue. By avoiding sticking, the integrity of the seal created is not damaged or

its strength compromised from separating the jaws **34** and **36** after the seal has been formed, as would be the case if the tissue stuck to the jaws.

[0070] The impulse of electrical power delivered from the power control device **48** has a power density of greater than 1500 Watts per square inch (W/in²) (233 W/cm²) of the working surfaces of the jaws **34** and **36**, and preferably in the range of 2500 W/in² to 3000 W/in² (388 W/cm² to 465 W/cm²). This power density is considerably higher than the typical power density of 115-350 W/in² (18-54 W/cm²) obtainable from a prior art RF tissue fusion device that is presently widely used. The impulse of electrical power raises the temperature of the jaws at a preferable rate of about 500° C. per second or more. An impulse of electrical power of this magnitude is sufficient to increase the temperature of the jaws **34** and **36** to about 220° C. to 320° C. very quickly after application of the impulse. The tissue fusion and cutting occurs over the 1.5-2.0 second preferred time duration of the electrical power impulse, allowing the jaws **34** and **36** to be separated or moved apart from one another to release the sealed area immediately after terminating the electrical power impulse.

[0071] The time required for achieving a reliable seal with high integrity against leaking and simultaneously cutting the tissue is related to the amount of tissue squeezed between the working surfaces, the type of tissue involved and the temperature applied to the tissue. Larger vessels, thicker walled vessels or larger amounts of tissue typically require longer sealing times and/or higher temperatures. Effective seals and cuts of typical small to medium vessels of 2-3 mm diameter are achieved with electrical impulses of less than 1.5 seconds duration, while seals of larger vessels in the neighborhood of 7-8 mm diameter are achieved with electrical impulses of about 1.5-2.0 seconds duration. Electrical impulses having a time duration of up to about 4.0 seconds are effective in some situations involving very large vessels, more massive amounts of high-density tissue, low thermal conductivity tissue, and/or lower temperatures.

[0072] Achieving consistent, reliable seals and simultaneous cuts on a wide range of different sizes and types of vessels provides a significant procedural advantage over known prior art tissue sealing apparatus. Known prior art vessel sealing techniques are believed to require at least 5-12 seconds of power application before a seal is formed and then the time required to advance a mechanical blade slowly through the sealed area and then withdrawn before the vessel can be released. The advancement of the mechanical blade must progress relatively slowly to avoid distorting the sealed area and compromising the integrity of the sealed area which could lead to a leak. In general, 5-10 seconds is required for manual advancement and retraction of the blade, provided that the blade does not become jammed or stuck. Those known prior art electrothermal systems which attempt sealing and simultaneously cutting require times of at least 30-60 seconds to perform both sealing and simultaneous cutting, and then the cutting is more akin to ragged obliteration rather than a well-defined linear separation. Thus, simultaneous cutting and sealing is accomplished with the present invention considerably more quickly compared to known prior art techniques. In addition, the seal created by the present invention has enhanced integrity and resistance to failure after cutting, compared to prior art seals.

[0073] The vessel **21** exemplifies biological tissue which is sealed and simultaneously cut with the present invention,

and the lumen 42 of the vessel 21 exemplifies a lumen, duct, passageway, chamber or gap or separation which is to be permanently bonded, occluded, sealed, fused or joined. The actions of bonding, occluding, sealing, fusing or joining tissues are collectively referred to herein as fusion or sealing. The action of separating the tissue after it has been fused or sealed is referred to herein as cutting or separation. In addition to the vessel 21, which may be an artery or a vein, other specific examples of biological tissue which may be fused or sealed and thereafter cut include fallopian tubes, bile ducts, tissue surrounding an aveoli or air sac in the lung, the colon or bowel, or any other tissue where surgical ligation might be performed. In most but not necessarily all of the cases where tissue fusion or sealing and simultaneous cutting is performed, the purpose of sealing or fusing the tissue is to confine a fluid or other bodily substance and its associated flow within a passageway which is either defined by or closed by fusing or sealing and the purpose of cutting the tissue is to excise tissue for surgical purposes. Therefore, in accordance with a naming convention followed in this detailed description, the walls 44 of the vessel 21 are examples of apposite pieces of biological tissue which are fused or sealed, the lumen 42 of the vessel 21, is an example of a passageway which is permanently occluded or closed or defined by sealing the apposite walls 44 at the interface 46 of the vessel 21, and an example of cutting the tissue occurs through the sealed area 50 along the separation line 51 with the apposite walls 44 sealed at the interface 46 occluding the lumen of the vessel on opposite sides of the separation line 51.

[0074] The smoothness of the working surfaces 38 and 40 of the high thermal conductivity jaws 34 and 36 contributes to creating seals of high integrity and cutting the tissue in a short amount of time. Smooth working surfaces 38 and 40 release the fused and separated tissue from the jaws 34 and 36 without sticking when the jaws separate (FIG. 6), despite the relatively high temperature of those jaws when compressing them against the tissue during fusion and simultaneous cutting. Preventing the tissue from sticking to the jaws as they separate avoids pulling the fused vessel walls apart, which could destroy or weaken the sealed area. Consequently, the fused interface of the vessel walls will have substantially all of the integrity and strength created by the fusion process, and that integrity and strength is not diminished by separation forces when the jaws separate. The smooth working surfaces 38 and 40 decrease the risk that the seal will ultimately fail.

[0075] Tissue sticking to the working surfaces of the heated jaws is a substantial problem in prior art devices. If the tissue sticks to the jaws as they separate, the integrity of the fused interface at the sealed area of the vessel will be compromised by the tendency to pull the sealed vessel walls apart at the fused interface 46. Even if the fused apposite vessel walls are not separated at the fusion interface, the separation force may weaken the walls enough to allow the natural fluid pressure within the lumen or passageway to eventually separate the vessel walls and create a leak.

[0076] Quickly achieving seals of high integrity while simultaneously cutting the tissue is also facilitated by an even distribution of compression, force or pressure across the squeezed vessel walls 44 at the interface 46 (FIG. 4). The even force or pressure distribution across the tissue interface 46 is obtained by parallel movement of the working surfaces 38 and 40 toward one another when compressing the vessel

21 (FIGS. 4 and 5). The parallel movement mechanism 28 causes the jaws 34 and 36 and their respective working surfaces 38 and 40 to move parallel to each other when opening and closing and compressing and releasing the vessel. The parallel movement of the jaws 34 and 36 avoids introducing shear forces on the sealed tissue interfaces 46 of the separated vessel pieces (FIGS. 4 and 5) when the jaws separate. Shear forces have the effect of weakening the sealed tissue interface and diminishing the strength of the seal created on each of the separated vessel pieces.

[0077] Details of the parallel movement mechanism 28 of the instrument 22 are explained and shown mainly in conjunction with FIG. 7 but also in FIGS. 1, 2 and 6. The proximal handles 24 and 26 pivot with respect to one another in opening and closing movements. The parallel movement mechanism 28 transfers the force created by the opening and closing movements of the handles 24 and 26 into parallel opening and closing movement of the distal arms 30 and 32. The parallel opening and closing movement occurs over the range of movement where the tissue is compressed between the working surfaces of the jaws during tissue fusion to the point where the working surfaces 38 and 40 contact one another with a zero distance gap there between. The parallel movement avoids introducing adverse shear forces on the fused tissue and creates even force and pressure on the tissue when compressed for fusion and cutting.

[0078] The parallel movement mechanism 28 is enclosed within a housing 52 (FIGS. 1, 2 and 6). The housing 52 is formed by a rear wall member 54 and a front closure member 56 which includes integral top, bottom and side wall portions which enclose internal components of the parallel movement mechanism 28. Openings are formed in the integral side wall portions of the front closure member 56 to allow the handles 24 and 26 and the arms 30 and 32 to extend into the housing 52.

[0079] The top handle 24 is integrally attached at its distal end to a block 62, and the block 62 is rigidly attached to the rear wall member 54 by pins 64. The bottom arm 32 is formed integrally with the rear wall member 54. Thus, both the top handle 24 and the bottom arm 32 are rigidly connected relative to the rear wall member 54. Thus, the top handle 24 and the bottom arm 32 do not move relative to one another or relative to the rear wall member 54 or the housing 52. Only the bottom handle 26 and the top arm 30 and jaw 34 move relative to the stationary top handle 24 and the bottom arm 32.

[0080] The bottom handle 26 is pivotally connected to the rear wall member 54 at a pivot pin 66. The bottom handle 26 pivots around the pivot pin 66. When the top and bottom handles 24 and 26 are separated or moved toward one another, only the bottom handle 26 possesses the freedom to pivot. The pivot pin 66 is located slightly proximally from the distal end of the bottom handle 26.

[0081] The top arm 30 has a flange 68 integrally attached to its proximal end. The flange 68 extends generally parallel to the rear wall member 54. As the top arm 30 moves upward and downward, the flange 68 moves upward and downward with the top arm 30 within the housing 52 between the rear wall and front closure members 54 and 56.

[0082] A rail 70 is rigidly attached to the rear wall member 54 by pins 72. The rail 70 extends perpendicularly relative to the extension of the bottom arm 32. The rail 70 projects outward from the rear wall member 54 toward the flange 68. A guide block 74 is attached to the flange 68 by pins 78. The

guide block includes a center channel 76 which conforms to the cross-sectional shape of the rail 70 and which movably receives and surrounds the rail 70. The size of the center channel 76 permits a slight clearance on each of the three lateral sides of the rail 70 which extend outward from the rear wall member 54. The guide block 74, flange 68 and the attached top distal arm 30 are therefore movable along a path defined by the rail 70 and relative to the rear wall member 54.

[0083] The rail 70 is oriented perpendicularly to both the top and bottom arms 30, and therefore movement of the top arm 30 maintains the same parallel angular relationship with the bottom arm 32. The rail 70 has substantial structure to withstand the torque applied to the distal end of the top arm 30 during tissue compression to maintain the same relative angular relationship of the top arm 30 with the bottom arm 32.

[0084] One end of a link 80 is pivotally connected at the distal end of the bottom handle 26 by a pivot pin 82. The other end of the link 80 is pivotally connected to the flange 68 by another pivot pin 84. Upon the clockwise (as shown in FIG. 7) pivoting movement of the bottom handle 26 relative to the top handle 24, the distal end of the bottom handle 26 transfers upward force through the link 80 to the flange 68. The flange 68 moves upward along the rail 70, and causes the connected top arm 30 to separate from the bottom arm 32. Consequently, an opening movement of the bottom handle 26 relative to the top handle 24 causes an opening separation movement of the top arm 30 relative to the bottom arm 32. A gap or separation is created between the working surfaces 38 and 40 of the top and bottom jaws 34 and 36 by the separation movement of the bottom arm 32 relative to the top arm 30.

[0085] Closing the top and bottom handles 24 and 26 moves the distal end of the bottom handle 26 downward, causing the link 80 to move the flange 68 downward along the rail 70. The top arm 30 moves downward toward the stationary bottom arm 32, thereby closing the gap between the working surfaces 38 and 40 of the top and bottom jaws 34 and 36.

[0086] The movement of the top arm 30 is restricted by the orientation of the rail 70 and the guide block 74 which is connected to the flange 68. Because the guide block 74 can only move vertically as dictated by the rail 70, the flange 68 and the integrally attached top arm 30 can only move vertically as well. The vertical motion requires the parallel angular relationship of the top and bottom jaws 34 and 36 to remain constant as the top arm 30 opens and closes relative to the bottom arm 32.

[0087] The jaws 34 and 36 are attached to the top and bottom arms 30 and 32 so that the working surfaces 38 and 40 of the jaws 34 and 36 extend parallel with one another in a longitudinal dimension extending along the arms 30 and 32. The transverse dimension of the working surfaces 38 and 40 may also be planar with respect to one another (FIG. 12), but preferably one of the working surfaces has a slight convex or crowned shape (FIG. 13) while the other working surface is planar.

[0088] The parallel movement of the top and bottom arms 30 and 32 and the top and bottom jaws 34 and 36 allows the working surfaces 38 and 40 to apply and distribute force evenly across the compressed interface 46 (FIG. 4) and until the compressed tissue is separated at the parting line 51 (FIG. 5). The even force application is important to obtain

even and uniform reconstitution of the denatured protein chains during fusion and even and uniform parting of the tissue along the separation line 51 during cutting, all of which results in enhanced strength and integrity of the sealed interface 46 (FIG. 4) and the sealed areas 50 (FIGS. 6 and 20) adjacent to the separation line 51. The parallel movement of the working surfaces 38 and 40 does not impart any shearing force on the sealed areas 50 (FIGS. 6 and 20) as the working surfaces 38 and 40 separate from one another. Such a shearing force could compromise the integrity of the fused interface 46 (FIG. 4), apart from whether the heated, compressed and cut vessel 21 has any tendency to stick to the working surfaces of the jaws as they separate.

[0089] The mechanical advantage resulting from closing the handles 24 and 26, transferred through the parallel movement mechanism 28, moves the arms 30 and 32 and jaws 34 and 36 to compress and cut the vessel 21 uniformly at each point on the interface 46 of the two opposite vessel walls 44. The applied force results in compressing the heated pieces of tissue to a compressed tissue thickness sufficient to fuse the tissue pieces, which in the case of blood vessels is about 0.05-0.10 mm, at which point fusion occurs. Continued compression of the pieces of tissue until a thickness of approximately zero (no gap) is achieved between the working surfaces results in cutting the tissue, after it has been fused. In order to achieve this range of compression, the parallel movement mechanism 28 must obtain an adequate mechanical advantage to transfer a comfortable amount of force applied on the handles 24 and 26 to the tissue. The force is related to the pressure between the working surfaces 38 and 40. The pressure is determined by the confrontational surface areas of the working surfaces 38 and 40 and the amount of force applied to the arms 30 and 32.

[0090] In a preferred embodiment, the working surfaces have a length of about 25 mm and a transverse width of about 5 mm, creating an effective confrontational surface area of approximately 125 mm². The mechanical advantage must therefore be capable of producing pressure of at least 1.2 Newtons per square millimeter (N/mm²) with comfortable squeezing pressure on the handles 24 and 26. Producing a pressure of 1.2 N/mm² will assure a force of 150 N at each point of the compressed apposite tissue followed by severing of the tissue as a result of the force creating a zero gap between the working surfaces. Producing a pressure of 0.88-1.2 N/Mm² will assure a force of 110 N-150 N at each point of the compressed apposite tissue before it is severed. Because the pressure may vary according to the size of tissue squeezed between the working surfaces 38 and 40, the force applied at each point to the two pieces of compressed tissue is a measure of the effectiveness of the compression necessary to achieve good tissue fusion and cutting. However, pressure must be considered to assure that an adequate amount of compression force is available to ultimately achieve the zero or no distance gap between the working surfaces 38 and 40 of the jaws 34 and 36 to cut the tissue following fusion.

[0091] Details of the jaws 34 and 36 are better understood by reference to FIGS. 3-5 and 8-13. Each jaw 34 and 36 is essentially of the same structure and configuration, although the top and bottom jaws may be of a mirror image configuration with respect to one another. Each jaw 34 and 36 is preferably formed of a ceramic material with a high thermal conductivity, such as aluminum nitride. The jaws 34 and 36 are secured to the arms 30 and 32 with an adhesive, such as

epoxy, which is applied in a layer 86 between the jaws 34 and 36 and the arms 30 and 32. Insulating spacers 90 are positioned near the distal and proximal ends of each of the jaws 34 and 36 between the jaws 34 and 36 and the arms 30 and 32. The adhesive layer 86 occupies the spaces between the spacers 90, the jaws 34 and 36 and the arms 30 and 32.

[0092] The heating elements 49 are embedded in the ceramic material of the jaws 34 and 36, as shown in FIGS. 8, 10 and 11. The heating element 49 in each jaw 34 and 36 is essentially the same. Similarly, both jaws 34 and 36 are essentially the same, except with respect to the possibility of one or both of the jaws having a crowned working surface (FIG. 13) and the two jaws being mirror image configurations with respect to one another. Because of the similarities, the heating element 49 and the jaw 36 are described in conjunction with FIGS. 9-13, with the understanding that the heating element 49 and the jaw 34 are essentially the same.

[0093] The heating element 49 is formed by a length of an electrically conductive resistance material which produces heat when conducting electrical current. The heating element 49 has a high thermal shock withstanding capability and a high power density conducting capability. An example of one such electrically conductive resistance material which offers these capabilities is molybdenum. The heating element 49 extends substantially over the area of the jaw 36 (FIG. 11) so that heat is produced relatively uniformly throughout the jaw. The heat from the heating element 49 is conducted substantially uniformly through the jaw 36 due to the high thermal conductivity of the ceramic material from which the jaw 36 is formed, resulting in approximately equal temperature from point to point along the working surface 40 of the jaw 36.

[0094] Electrical wires 96 and 98 connect to opposite ends of the heating element 49. Electrical current is supplied to the heating element 49 through the wires 96 and 98. The wires 96 and 98 extend through shoulders 100 and 102 which are formed on a back side 104 of the jaw from the same ceramic material as the jaw 36. The shoulders 100 and 102 surround and support the wires 96 and 98 and hold them in position as part of the jaw 36. The ceramic material of the jaw 36 is an electrical insulator, thereby assuring that the current conducted through the wires 96 and 98 flows through the heating element 49 without short-circuiting to the arms 30 and 32 of the instrument 22 (FIG. 1).

[0095] To embed the heating element 49 within the jaw 36, enough powdered ceramic material to form the working surface 40 and the outer portion of the jaw 36 is placed in a mold and sintered. Thereafter, the heating element 49 is placed on this outer partially-formed jaw portion, preferably by using conventional fluid deposition techniques such as inking. More powdered ceramic material is then placed on top of the sintered outer portion of the jaw and the heating element 49 to form the remaining inner portion of the jaw including back side 104 and the shoulders 100 and 102. Thereafter, the powdered ceramic material which forms the inner portion of the jaw is sintered to form the ceramic inner portion of the jaw 36 while also sintering that inner portion of the jaw 36 to the previously-formed outer portion of the jaw 36, thereby completing the integral ceramic structure of the jaw.

[0096] In addition to embedding the heating element 49 within the jaw in the manner described, the heating element can also be embedded by following the described procedure but without sintering the outer portion until the inner portion

has also been formed. A single sintering occurs with respect to both the outer and inner portions simultaneously to hold the heating element in place.

[0097] The wires 96 and 98 are mechanically and electrically connected to the ends of the heating element 49 by drilling holes through the shoulders 100 and 102 until the holes contact the ends of the embedded heating element 49. The wires 96 and 98 are inserted through the holes until the ends of these wires contact the ends of the heating element 49. The ends of the wires 96 and 98 and the ends of the heating element 49 are permanently connected together by brazing in an oven. The wires 96 and 98 and the shoulders 100 and 102 therefore extend from the back side 104 of the jaw 36.

[0098] When the jaws 34 and 36 are attached to the arms 30 and 32, respectively, by the adhesive layer 86, the wires 96 and 98 extend through openings 105 and 107 which are formed in each of the arms 30 and 32 to receive the wires 96 and 98, as shown in FIGS. 8 and 10. The openings 105 and 107 are sufficiently large to avoid electrical contact with the wires 96 and 98, although the wires 96 and 98 are insulated in the areas within the openings 105 and 107. Conductors 106 and 108 connect to the ends of the wires 96 and 98. The conductors 106 and 108 from each jaw 34 and 36 extend through the housing 52 of the parallel movement mechanism 28 and along the top handle 24 to the power control device 48, as shown in FIGS. 1 and 2. The power control device 48 delivers the electrical current through the conductors 106 and 108 to the heating element 49 in each jaw 34 and 36, thereby heating the jaws.

[0099] The current supplied by the power control device 48 (FIGS. 1 and 2) is regulated relative to the temperature of the working surfaces 38 and 40 of the jaws 34 and 36. The temperature of each jaw is separately measured by a thermocouple 110 associated with each jaw, shown in FIGS. 3-5, 7 and 9. The thermocouple 110 associated with each jaw 34 and 36 is essentially the same. Therefore, only one thermocouple 110 is described in association with the jaw 36 shown in FIG. 10, since the other thermocouple is substantially identical.

[0100] The thermocouple 110 comprises an electrical node or junction 112 of two dissimilar metal wires 116 and 118, as shown in FIG. 10. The junction of the two dissimilar wires 116 and 118 creates a conventional type JT/C thermocouple junction 112. A slight voltage is developed at the junction 112 by the inherent electrical characteristics of the two dissimilar metal wires 116 and 118, and the magnitude of that voltage varies in relationship to the temperature of the junction 112. Thus, the voltage developed at the junction 112 is related to the temperature of the junction 112. The wires 116 and 118 extend through an opening 119 formed in each arm 30 and 32 (FIGS. 3-5). The wires 116 and 118 may be insulated over that portion of their length which extends through the opening 119.

[0101] The voltage developed at the junction 112 is conducted through the wires 116 and 118 to conductors 120 and 122, which connect to the ends of the wires 116 and 118, respectively. The conductors 120 and 122 extend from the thermocouple 110 of each jaw 34 and 36 through the housing 52 of the parallel movement mechanism 28 and along the top handle 24 to the power control device 48, as shown in FIGS. 1 and 2. The voltage from the thermocouple 110, conducted through the conductors 120 and 122, is used by the power control device 48 as a feedback signal to control the amount

of electrical current delivered through the conductors **106** and **108** and the wires **96** and **98** to the heating element **49** in the jaws **34** and **36**, thereby independently regulating the temperature of the working surfaces of the jaws.

[0102] The thermocouple **110** is permanently thermally and mechanically attached to the jaw by oven brazing the junction **112** of the dissimilar metal wires **116** and **118** within a recess **114** formed into the ceramic material on the back side **104** of each jaw, as shown in FIG. 10. The attachment of the junction **112** to each jaw establishes good thermal conductivity of the junction **112** with each jaw, thereby enabling the junction **112** to respond to the temperature of the jaw. The high thermal conductivity material of each jaw distributes the heat from the heating element **49** throughout the jaw relatively rapidly. The temperature of the working surface of the jaw is typically slightly different from the temperature of the junction **112** because the junction **112** is not exactly at the working surface and slight dynamic thermal gradients exist within the jaw despite the high thermal conductivity of the jaw material. However, the temperature measured by the thermocouple junction **112** is closely correlated to the temperature of the working surface of the jaw, to result in temperature measurements which closely represent the temperature of the jaw working surface. Moreover, because the tissue compressed between the jaws during tissue fusion is relatively thin, the thermal transfer to the thin tissue causes that tissue to assume a temperature which is very close to the temperature of the jaw working surfaces.

[0103] Both of the working surfaces **38** and **40** may be flat and planar as shown in FIG. 12. In such circumstances the planar working surfaces are maintained in a parallel relationship with one another by the positioning of the jaws **34** and **36** on the arms and by the parallel movement of the arms **30** and **32**. Longitudinal edges **124** of the jaws **34** and **36** are rounded or radiused to avoid imparting or concentrating pressure to the vessel **21** in such a way to weaken the vessel at the edge of seal formed or to cut the vessel at the edge of the sealed area, thereby creating a weakened sealed area.

[0104] A preferred alternative to the planar configuration of the working surfaces **38** and **40** is one flat planar working surface and a crowned working surface on the opposite jaw. Both working surfaces could also be crowned. A crowned working surface **40** is shown in FIG. 13. The working surface **40** possesses a slight outward convex shape when viewed transversely to the longitudinal dimension of the jaw **36**, as shown in FIG. 13. The crowned or convex curvature of the working surface is useful for applying more force to the vessel at the center of the working surface for cutting the sealed area, while simultaneously creating a slightly graduated variation in the extent of tissue compression from the center of the working surface to the longitudinal radiused edges **124**. The slight variation in compression is instrumental in achieving separation of tissue along the separation line **51** (FIGS. 6 and 20) while simultaneously achieving an optimal sealing force on the tissue squeezed between the working surfaces **38** and **40**. However, in most cases, once adequate pressure is obtained, it is not necessary to achieve optimal pressure to accomplish adequate fusion with the present invention, so long as sufficient force is ultimately applied to reduce the thickness of compressed tissue to zero between the working surfaces along the separation line **51** at the fused area.

[0105] The curvature of the crowned working surface **40** of the jaw is in the transverse direction across the working surface. The amount of curvature of the working surface **40**, as shown in FIG. 13, is such that the radius of curvature of the working surface **40** in the transverse dimension is approximately 21 mm at a point where the transverse width of the jaw is approximately 5 mm. This radius of curvature generally causes the center of the crowned working surface to be approximately 0.1 mm higher than the working surfaces near the longitudinal edges **124** of the 5 mm wide jaw **36**, before those longitudinal edges **124** are radiused.

[0106] Each of the jaws **34** and **36** also curves laterally to the side, in the general shape of the typical "Maryland" jaw shape which is frequently preferred by surgeons, as shown in FIGS. 1, 2, 6-9 and 11. Furthermore the most forward or distal end of each of the jaws **34** and **36** has a reduced transverse dimension compared to the transverse dimension of the proximal or rearward end. This "Maryland" jaw shape facilitates viewing the jaws monoscopically during minimally invasive surgery, and the lesser transverse dimension of the distal end is useful for blunt dissection. The point of maximum convex curvature of the crowned working surfaces of such "Maryland" jaws extends on a curve which is approximately equidistant transverse between the edges of the jaws. Cutting occurs along the curved array of linear points of maximum convex curvature, and it is through the curved shape of the jaws that electrothermal cutting is accomplished on a linear curve. The curved cutting is reflected in the curvature of the separation line **51**.

[0107] An important aspect of the present invention is that the working surfaces **38** and **40**, and preferably side surfaces **123** and **125** (FIGS. 9, 12 and 13) and the radiused longitudinal edges **124** of the jaws **34** and **36**, have a high degree of smoothness. A sufficiently high degree of smoothness is capable of preventing any sticking of the compressed and heated tissue to the jaws **34** and **36** after the vessel **21** has been sealed and cut. The smoothness of the side surfaces **123** in **125** similarly prevents any overhanging tissue adjacent to the working surfaces **38** and **40** from sticking to the jaws **34** and **36** when the vessel **21** is sealed and cut. Eliminating the occurrence of tissue sticking to the jaws is a substantial improvement because sticking tissue is responsible for destroying or substantially weakening the seal in a significant proportion of those incidents where the seal fails. Eliminating the occurrence of tissue sticking to the jaws also offers a substantial convenience to surgeons, because a considerable amount of time is consumed during the surgical procedure in cleaning the jaws of adhered tissue. By avoiding the necessity to clean the jaws, a time required to perform the surgical procedure is diminished, resulting in reduced risk and trauma to the patient.

[0108] The conventional measurement of smoothness is referred to as Ra. To achieve the degree of smoothness most desirable in accordance with the present invention, the working surfaces **38** and **40**, the side surfaces **123** and **125** and the longitudinally radiused edges **124** of the jaws **34** and **36**, are formed from a ceramic material, such as aluminum nitride, or a material having a surface microstructure like ceramic material, and such surfaces have an Ra of 0.15 microns or less. Jaws formed of aluminum nitride with surfaces having a smoothness represented by an Ra of 0.15 microns or less have been determined to result in no tissue sticking to the jaws after fusion and cut procedure has been completed and the jaws are separated.

[0109] For jaw surface smoothness in the Ra range of 0.15 to 0.40 microns, a spectrum of smoothness exists where the frequency of sticking increases in relation to decreasing smoothness, although the frequency of sticking is not in a linear relationship to decreasing smoothness. For a small increase in smoothness at the lower end of the range, a large reduction in the frequency of tissue sticking occurs. For an Ra of 0.15 microns or less, no sticking of the tissue has been observed, and the force required to separate the working surfaces from the vessel is not significantly different than if the vessel had not been present between the working surfaces. For an Ra range of 0.15 to 0.20 microns, sticking does not occur or only occurs with very minimal or virtually nonexistent frequency, and the force required to separate the working surfaces from the sealed and cut vessel is not significantly greater than the force required to separate the working surfaces from the sealed and cut vessel when the Ra is less than 0.15 microns. In the Ra range of 0.20 to 0.25 microns, sticking occurs with a slightly greater frequency, and the force required to separate the tissue from the working surfaces is slightly increased. In the Ra range of 0.25 to 0.40 microns, a moderate increase in the frequency of sticking occurs, and the force required to separate the tissue from the working surfaces is also moderately increased. Finally, in the Ra range of 0.40 to 0.50 microns, sticking becomes significantly more frequent and the force required to separate the tissue from the working surfaces is further increased. However, an Ra in the range of 0.40 to 0.50 microns provides less tissue sticking than with the known prior art jaws used for tissue fusion by itself, or tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting, or for those jaws which have an Ra of about 0.60 microns or greater.

[0110] The sticking of tissue described herein applies to that tissue upon which pressure has been applied from the working surfaces during tissue fusion and cutting. Sticking is not intended to apply to any tissue or fluid, such as blood, which remains on the working surfaces after the jaws have been separated and the sealed and cut tissue is removed from the working surfaces. Although tissue and fluid may remain on the working surfaces after the tissue is removed, such tissue and dried fluid may easily be wiped from the working surfaces.

[0111] A conventional profilometer is used to measure the roughness of the working surfaces and to obtain the Ra values described herein. One example of such a commercially available profilometer is a Pocket Surf® portable surface roughness gauge manufactured by Mahr Federal, Inc. of Germany. Prior to measuring the roughness of the working surfaces, the profilometer was calibrated using a reference that had a known Ra. The Ra reference was certified against a known standard in accordance with ISO or ANSI standard procedures. The exemplary profilometer employed to obtain the Ra measurements described herein had an accuracy of ± 0.05 microns and a resolution of 0.01 microns.

[0112] One useful ceramic material from which to form the jaws **34** and **36** is aluminum nitride. Aluminum nitride has a relatively high thermal conductivity of about 140-180 W/m ° K. Aluminum nitride can also be polished to a smoothness of an Ra of 0.15 microns or less. When removed from the sintering oven after formation in a smooth mold, aluminum nitride can have an Ra as low as 0.60 microns, but not significantly lower. Working surfaces with an Ra of 0.60

microns appear smooth, but that apparent smoothness is above the acceptable range of Ra in accordance with the present invention.

[0113] Any polishing or other smoothing technique that can achieve the desired degree of smoothness of the working surfaces may be employed in accordance with the present invention. A satisfactory level of smoothness of the working surfaces of aluminum nitride jaws has been achieved by polishing the working surfaces using various grits of diamond paper or diamond pastes. Finer grades of abrasives were used in succession as the polishing proceeded toward the desired smoothness. The desired degree of smoothness was achieved by polishing the working surfaces by hand, successively using diamond grit paper with particle sizes of 6, 3, 1, 0.50, 0.25 and 0.10 microns in that order.

[0114] If the polishing is initiated with a grinding wheel or grit paper having a too coarse particle size, the working surface may be damaged and roughened to the extent that the desired smoothness can not be achieved when finer grits are used subsequently in the polishing process. When starting the polishing with too coarse of a particle size, the highest degree of smoothness (Ra of 0.15 microns or less) is difficult or impossible to achieve on aluminum nitride ceramic surfaces.

[0115] A strictly uniform smoothness across the working surfaces **38** and **40** is not required. Only those portions of the working surfaces **38** and **40** which contact the vessel **21** (FIG. 2) must be smoothed to the desired degree to obtain reduced tissue sticking. Thus, to the extent that the side surfaces **123** and **125** do not touch tissue, they may not require the same degree of smoothness as the working surfaces **38** and **40** and the longitudinal radiused edges **124**.

[0116] The amount of force transferred from the working surfaces **38** and **40** of the jaws **34** and **36** to the vessel **21** is measured by a conventional strain gauge **126** attached to a section **128** of the top proximal handle **24**, shown in FIG. 7. The section **128** of the top handle **24** has a reduced cross-sectional area. The strain gauge **126** is attached to extend longitudinally along the reduced cross-sectional area section **128**. Attached in this manner, the strain gauge **126** measures the amount of deflection of the section **128** created by the force resulting from squeezing the handles **24** and **26** together. The extent of deflection of the section **128** is accurately correlated to the amount of force applied from the distal arms **30** and **32** to the tissue squeezed between the working surfaces **38** and **40** (FIG. 4) and as the tissue separates when the distance between the working surfaces **38** and **40** approaches zero (FIG. 5). The signals from the strain gauge **126** are conducted through two conductors, collectively referenced **130**, to the power control device **48**, where those force-related signals are used to create a display of the force imparted to the compressed tissue and to control the power control device **48**.

[0117] A handle locking and release mechanism **131** is connected to the proximal ends of the handles **24** and **26**, as shown mainly in FIG. 7, and also in FIGS. 1, 2 and 6. The handle locking and release mechanism **131** includes a curved extension **132** with ratchet teeth **134** that extends downward from the proximal end of the top handle **24**. The bottom handle **26** includes a ratchet pawl **136** that extends rearward from the proximal end of the bottom handle **26**. The ratchet pawl **136** is connected to a rod **138** which extends longitudinally within the interior of the bottom handle **26**. A spring **140** is connected between a proximal

end of the rod 138 and a shoulder 141 of the bottom handle 26. The spring 140 is compressed and normally biases the rod 138 in the rearward direction. The normal rearward bias from the spring 140 on the rod 138 extends the ratchet pawl 136 rearward from the proximal end of the bottom handle 26.

[0118] When the handles 24 and 26 are squeezed together, the ratchet pawl 136 slides by and engages the individual ratchet teeth 134 in succession, until the handles 24 and 26 reach a squeezed-together position where the desired amount of force or pressure to be maintained on the vessel 21 during fusion without requiring the surgeon to continually squeeze the handles 24 and 26. The handle locking and release mechanism 131 also prevents the force or pressure on the compressed vessel from substantially decreasing during the tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting procedure. The interaction of the ratchet pawl 136 with the ratchet teeth 134 prevents the handles 24 and 26 from moving apart from their squeezed-together position, until the ratchet pawl 136 is separated from the ratchet teeth 134.

[0119] The handle locking and release mechanism 131 includes a trigger 142 which, when squeezed, separates the ratchet pawl 136 from the ratchet teeth 134 and thereby allows the handles 24 and 26 to open with respect to one another. The trigger 142 includes a contact arm 144 which contacts and interacts with a shoulder 146 at the distal end of the rod 138. The normal bias from the spring 140 on the rod 138 biases the shoulder 146 against the contact arm 144, and causes the trigger 142 to assume the normal position shown in FIG. 2, with a release arm 148 of the trigger 142 extending generally parallel with the elongated dimension of the bottom handle 26. To disengage the ratchet pawl 136 from the ratchet teeth 134, the trigger 142 is squeezed which causes the release arm 148 to pivot counterclockwise as shown in FIG. 7. The counterclockwise movement of the contact arm 144 against the shoulder 146 moves the rod 138 in the distal direction, as shown in FIG. 7, and the distal movement of the rod 136 releases the engagement of the ratchet pawl 136 with the ratchet teeth 134. With the ratchet pawl 136 released from the ratchet teeth 134, the handles 24 and 26 are free to move away from one another.

[0120] The following example illustrates the utility of the smooth working surfaces 38 and 40 in tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting. In two separate laboratory experiments, tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting was performed on mesentery and spleen tissue. The tissue fusion and cutting instrument used in the experiment had aluminum nitride jaws which had been hand polished to an Ra of about 0.15 microns as determined by at least five measurements over the working surfaces. The aluminum nitride ceramic jaws had a width dimension of 5 mm and a length dimension of 25 mm and a thickness dimension of 1.5 mm. One of the working surfaces was crowned (FIG. 13) and the other working surface was flat or planar (FIG. 12). Each sample of tissue was compressed between the jaw working surfaces with a force sufficient to reduce the gap between the working surfaces to zero at the conclusion of the procedure, thereby cutting the tissue. An impulse of power having a power

density of 1500 W/in² (233 W/cm²) was delivered by the power control device 48 (FIG. 1) to the heating elements in the jaws. The power impulse used in fusing and simultaneous cutting the mesentery had a 2.0 second time duration. The power impulse used in fusing and simultaneously cutting the spleen had a 1.5 second time duration. The power impulses produced in both instances contained enough thermal energy to successfully seal the tissue as well as simultaneously cut the tissue. The thermocouples of the jaws recorded peak temperatures of the jaw working surfaces of about 230° C. when fusing and simultaneously cutting the mesentery and recorded peak temperatures of the jaw working surfaces of about 240° C. when fusing and simultaneously cutting the spleen.

[0121] When cutting the mesentery, 5 consecutive cuts were performed for a total length of the cut of approximately 125 mm. The total time required to cut the entire 125 mm length was approximately 38 seconds. Following the mesentery cut procedure, a blue sheet was placed underneath the cut portion of the mesentery and the mesenteric vessels were inspected for bleeding. No bleeding was observed. When cutting the spleen, 5 consecutive cuts were performed on previously unaffected live tissue, with no adverse bleeding from the sealed areas adjoining the separation line. Eleven other cuts were performed at locations which overlap areas which had previously only been sealed. In other words, the 11 cuts were a second procedure performed on top of an area which had previously been sealed only without cutting. Again, under such circumstances, no adverse consequences or deterioration of the sealed areas was observed.

[0122] After each fusion and simultaneous cut procedure was performed, the jaws were separated to release the fused and cut tissue. The tissue was considered stuck to one of the working surfaces if the fused and cut tissue did not separate itself immediately from the working surface which contacted the tissue. Of the tissue samples which were fused and simultaneously cut in these experiments, none adhered to the working surfaces of the jaws using this sticking evaluation criteria. Moreover, on occasion, blood or other tissue was present on the working surfaces of the jaws before the tissue sample was compressed between the jaws. Even in these adverse situations, the tissue did not stick to the smooth working surfaces. The blood or other tissue initially present on the jaws adhered to the tissue sample which had been fused and simultaneously cut, thereby producing clean working surfaces, but there was no adherence between the fused and cut tissue and the smooth working surfaces. Use of the present invention subsequent to these experiments has also confirmed the non-stick performance of the polished working surfaces.

[0123] More details concerning the power control device 48 are shown in FIGS. 14-15. As shown in FIG. 14, the power control device 48 includes a controller 150 which includes a memory 152 and a processor 154. The memory 152 stores data and information supplied by conventional input devices 156 and/or supplied from a touch screen (not shown) of a conventional monitor 158. The information stored in the memory 152 includes criteria 160 which establish the parameters for one or more standard tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting procedures. The standard procedure criteria 160 includes information describing the temperature to be attained at the working surfaces 38 and 40 of the jaws 34 and 36 of the instrument 22, the amount of force to be applied by the jaws 34 and 36 to the vessel 21 or

other tissue during the procedure, and the amount of time during which electrical power is to be delivered to heat the jaws 34 and 36 to perform the procedure.

[0124] In addition, the memory 152 stores certain user-selected criteria 162 which can be used in place of some or all the standard procedure criteria 160 to accomplish tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting. The ability to select and alter the criteria 162 allows the user to adjust the fusion criteria to the surgeon's preferences or to perform procedures which may be better accomplished by using user-selected criteria rather than standard criteria.

[0125] The memory 152 also stores the instructional code which defines certain functional routines 164. The functional routines 164 cause the processor 154 to control the power delivered to the jaws 34 and 36. The functional routines 164 also contain control constants and gain factors that are used when the processor 164 executes certain functional routines, as illustrated by the examples described below.

[0126] One of the functional routines executed by the processor 154 is a temperature control feedback routine 166. The temperature control feedback routine 166 is executed in response to temperature signals 168 and 170 obtained from the sensing of the temperatures of the top jaw 34 and the bottom jaw 36 by their respective thermocouples 110 (FIG. 10) and supplied over the conductors 120 and 122. The processor 154 responds to the individual temperature signals 168 and 170 from each of the top and bottom jaws 34 and 36 and separately regulates the amount of electrical power supplied to each top and bottom jaw heating element 49. In doing so, the processor 154 executes the same temperature control feedback routine 166 for each jaw 34 and 36, thereby separately regulating the temperature of each jaw 34 and 36. In most cases, it is desired that the temperatures of both jaws 34 and 36 be the same during the procedure, but different amounts of electrical power may be required to cause each jaw 34 and 36 to attain and maintain the desired temperature, due to different thermal loads imposed by different physiology of the tissue or vessel 21 contacted by each jaw 34 and 36.

[0127] The processor 154 creates switching signals 172 and 174 which are supplied to conventional controllable switches 176 and 178, such as solid-state relays. In response to the switching signals 172 and 174, the controllable switches 176 and 178 conduct electrical power from a conventional adjustable low-voltage, high-current direct current (DC) power supply 180 to the heating element 49 of the top jaw 34 and to the heating element 49 of the bottom jaw 36.

[0128] By separately controlling the characteristics of the switching signals 172 and 174, the conductivity characteristics of the controllable switches 176 and 178 are also separately varied to separately control the amount of electrical power delivered to each heating element 49 of the top and bottom jaws over the conductors 106 and 108. In this manner, the amount of electrical power, and consequently heat available at each of the jaws 34 and 36, is varied independently in each jaw.

[0129] The processor 154 also executes a criteria comparison routine 184. The criteria comparison routine 184 utilizes the temperature signals 168 and 170 from the top and bottom jaws and a force signal 186 supplied over the conductors 130 from the strain gauge 126, as well as internally generated time duration information which is

measured from the time that the impulse of electrical power is applied to the jaws 34 and 36. Execution of the comparison routine 184 creates information which is presented on the monitor 158 as graphs or other presentations of the temperature signals 168 and 170, the force signal 186 and the elapsed time. The temperature of each jaw 34 and 36 may be displayed separately on the monitor 158, while the force and the time are presented singularly with respect to each separate fusion procedure.

[0130] Execution of the comparison routine 184 also compares the temperature signals 168 and 170, the force signal 186 and the elapsed time to corresponding limits or values of the temperature, force and elapsed time established by the standard procedure criteria 160 or by the user-selected criteria 162 for the tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting procedure. The result of comparing the actual temperatures, force and elapsed time to the procedure criteria limits or values is information which is supplied to the monitor 158 and/or an annunciator 188. Execution of the comparison routine 184 identifies if and when the actual operative values associated with the tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting procedure fall outside of the procedure criteria limits or values. Under circumstances where the actual operative values achieve or deviate from the established procedure criteria values, visual and/or audible signals are delivered from the annunciator 188, and related signals may also be presented visually on the monitor 158.

[0131] For example, execution of the comparison routine 184 establishes the time instant at which electrical power impulse is delivered to the jaw heating elements. The comparison routine 184 monitors the force signal 186 to determine when the vessel 21 has been compressed sufficiently to apply the electrical power impulse for heating the jaws 34 and 36. A certain force limit must be exceeded by squeezing the handles 24 and 26 before the controller 150 recognizes that a tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting procedure is underway. Once the initial force limit value is attained, the controller 150 delivers the control signals 172 and 174 to the controllable switches 176 and 178 to apply electrical power to the heating element 49 of the top and bottom jaws, thereby heating the working surfaces of the jaws 34 and 36. Simultaneously, the comparison routine 184 begins timing the time duration at which the electrical power is delivered at the selected temperature for the procedure.

[0132] As another example of the execution of the comparison routine 184, once it is recognized that the temperature of the working surfaces 38 and 40 of the jaws 34 and 36 has reached the selected temperature, a signal is delivered from the annunciator 188. Under circumstances where one or both of the top and bottom jaw temperatures exceed or fall below the temperature limits, or under circumstances where the force between the jaws 34 and 36 has not reached the desired final level or exceeds or falls below the desired final level, an out-of-criteria signal is delivered from the annunciator 188. Such limit information may also be presented on the monitor 158 as well, and is used by the surgeon during use of the instrument 22.

[0133] A temperature feedback power control routine 166, which offers the well-known and significant advantage of predictive capability, is a proportional, integral, derivative (PID) computation, represented in functional block diagram form shown in FIG. 15 by a temperature control feedback circuit 190. The PID temperature control feedback circuit 190 is shown as interconnected individual functional

devices, but the PID functionality represented by the circuit 190 may also be executed by the instructional code executed by the processor 154 of the controller 150 (FIG. 14).

[0134] The temperature signal 168 or 170 supplied by the top or bottom thermocouple 110 of jaw 34 or 36 (FIG. 15) is multiplied in an amplifier 192 by a scaling factor K_j which converts the value of the temperature signal 168 or 170 from the jaw itself to a scaled temperature signal 194. The scale temperature signal 194 represents the temperature of the working surface of the jaw. The application of heat to the jaw from the heating element 49 (FIG. 11) causes slightly different temperatures at different locations in the jaws. A slight temperature gradient within the jaws causes the temperature at the working surfaces to be different from the temperature at other locations within the jaws, including the temperature at the location which is sensed by the thermocouple 110, despite the fact that the jaws are made from high thermal conductivity material. Accordingly, the temperature sensed by the thermocouple is not typically equal to the temperature of the working surface of the jaw which contacts the vessel being sealed. The scaling factor K_j is used to convert the actual thermocouple-sensed temperature signal 168 or 170 to the scaled temperature signal 194, by multiplying the scaling factor K_j and the actual thermocouple-sensed temperature signal 168 or 170. The result is that the scaled temperature signal 194 closely approximates the actual temperature of the working surface of the jaw.

[0135] The value of the scaling factor K_j is developed empirically, under conditions where the walls 44 of the vessel 21 are contacted and squeezed between the jaws. To empirically develop the value of K_j , it is necessary to conduct an actual temperature measurement of the jaw working surface, which can be accomplished by using conventional infrared temperature measurement techniques, for example. The actual temperature measurement is then related to the temperature measurement from the thermocouple to obtain the scaling factor K_j .

[0136] The scaling factor K_j may be different depending upon the desired temperature of the working surface of the jaw during the procedure. For example, the selection of a lower working surface temperature for the tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting procedure may result in a lower value for the scaling factor K_j compared to the scaling factor applicable when a higher working surface temperature is selected for a different tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting procedure. The values of the scaling factor K_j are stored in the memory 52 as part of the standard procedure criteria 160 (FIG. 14).

[0137] The amplifier 192 supplies a scaled temperature signal 194 to a negative input terminal of a comparator 196. A set temperature signal 198 is supplied to the positive input terminal of the comparator 196. The set temperature signal 196 represents the desired temperature of the working surfaces of the jaws which is to be attained and maintained during the tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting procedure. The set temperature signal 196 is one of the standard temperature criteria 160 or the user-selected temperature criteria 162 stored in the memory 152 (FIG. 14).

[0138] The comparator 196 subtracts the scaled temperature signal 194 from the set temperature signal 198, and the result is an error signal 200. The error signal 200 represents the difference between the actual temperature of the working surfaces of the jaw (signal 194) and the desired or set temperature of the working surfaces of the jaws for the

procedure (signal 198). It is the error signal 200 and the elapsed time that cause the predictive aspects of the proportional, integral and derivative functionality to create a control error signal 202 which will be used by the processor 154 to create the switching control signals 172 and 174 (FIG. 14). The switching control signals 172 and 174 regulate the temperature of the working surfaces 38 and 40 of the jaws 34 and 36.

[0139] The proportional aspect of the PID functionality is achieved by multiplying the error signal 200 by a proportional constant K_p in an amplifier 204. A proportionalized error signal 206 is created by the amplifier 204 and is supplied to one input terminal of a summer 208. The value of the proportional constant K_p is established through selection of the standard criteria 160 or the user-selected criteria 162 stored in the memory 152 (FIG. 14).

[0140] The integral aspect of the PID functionality is achieved by integrating the error signal 200 in an integrator 210. The integrator 210 supplies an integrated error signal 212 which is then multiplied in an amplifier 214 by an integration constant K_i to create an adjusted integrated error signal 216. The adjusted integrated error signal 216 is applied to another input terminal of the summer 208. The value of the integration constant K_i is established through selection of the standard criteria 160 or the user-selected criteria 162 stored in the memory 152 (FIG. 14).

[0141] The differential aspect of the PID functionality is achieved by differentiating the error signal 200 in a differentiator 218 to create a differentiated error signal 220. The differentiated error signal 220 is then multiplied in an amplifier 222 by a differentiation constant K_d to create an adjusted differentiated error signal 224. The differentiated error signal 224 is applied to a third input terminal of the summer 208. The value of the differentiation constant K_d is established through selection of the standard criteria 160 or the user-selected criteria 162 stored in the memory 152 (FIG. 14).

[0142] Although the differentiator 218 is shown as receiving the error signal 200, it is also possible for the differentiator 218 to respond to the scaled temperature signal 194. Under such circumstances, the differentiation of the scaled temperature signal 194 results in a higher value of the signal 220. Under these circumstances the value of the differentiation constant K_d is adjusted to represent the changed value of the signal 220.

[0143] The proportionalized error signal 206, the adjusted integrated error signal 216 and the adjusted differentiated error signal 224 are summed together in the summer 208. The result of the addition is the control error signal 202. The values of the proportional constant K_p , the integration constant K_i and the differentiation constant K_d are all selected to achieve the desired predictive capability resulting from the contribution of the proportionalized, integrated and differentiated error signals 206, 212 and 220 in creating the control error signal 202. Adjusting the values of the PID constants K_p , K_i and K_d in this manner allows the error signal 202 to achieve the desired degree of control to heat the jaws.

[0144] The values of the proportional constant K_p , the integration constant K_i and the differentiation constant K_d are different based upon the desired set temperature and the time for the fusion procedure. The amount of force applied during the fusion procedure may also have an effect on the value of the PID constants K_p , K_i and K_d , although that

impact will generally be less than the effect from the desired temperature and time duration of the fusion procedure.

[0145] The values of the PID constants K_p , K_i and K_d may remain constant throughout the delivery of power during the course of a single procedure, or they may also be varied during the delivery of power in a single procedure. For example one set of PID constants may be used when increasing the temperature of the working surfaces of the jaws to the desired set temperature, and another set of PID constants may be used to maintain the temperature of the working surfaces at the desired set temperature during the tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting procedure. The criteria comparison routine **184** executed by the processor **154** (FIG. **15**) substitutes the different proportional constants into the temperature control feedback routine **166** and the temperature control feedback circuit **190** according to the temperature of the jaw working surfaces, the elapsed time of the power impulse, and to a lesser degree, the force applied. All of the values of the PID constants are stored in the memory **152** (FIG. **14**).

[0146] In response to the control error signal **202**, the power control device **48**, shown in FIGS. **14** and **15**, delivers an impulse of electrical power which is sufficient to raise the temperature of the working surfaces of the jaws from room temperature to a sealing set point temperature of about 220° C. to 320° C. at a rate greater than 150° C. per second and preferably greater than 500° C. per second. The rate should be as high as possible without creating untoward side effects on the tissue. Of course, the power control device **48** also has the capability of maintaining the selected temperature for the time duration of the power impulse, which is preferably about 1.5 to 2.0 seconds but which may extend to approximately 4.0 seconds. In general, the impulse of power begins with the switching signals **172** and **174** causing the controllable switches **176** and **178** to deliver DC current from the power supply **180** until the temperature of the jaws approaches the set point temperature. Thereafter the switches **176** and **178** are turned on and off to maintain the set point temperature during the fusion procedure. In general the on-time decreases and the off time increases to maintain the set point temperature after it is initially achieved. Delivering the impulse of power is effective to quickly establish and maintain a set point temperature creates a strong and effective seal while simultaneously cutting the tissue.

[0147] To achieve these temperatures, a power density of about at least 1500 W/in² (2.33 W/mm²) and preferably greater than 2500 W/in² (3.88 W/mm²) is typically required, with the usual power density being in the range of 2500 W/in² to 3000 W/in² (3.878 W/mm² to 4.64 W/mm²). Higher power densities are required to achieve shorter procedure times and to seal and simultaneously cut larger vessels and more massive tissues. However, the power density is not always an accurate representation of the capability of raising and maintaining the working surfaces of the jaws at the desired tissue fusion temperature. The thermal load created by the compressed vessel or tissue is variable, and thus directly influences the power density. Moreover, the distal arms **30** and **32** of the instrument **22** (FIG. **1**), the wires **96** and **98** and the conductors **106** and **108** connected to the jaw heating elements **49** (FIG. **13**) and the dissimilar wires **116** and **118** of the thermocouple **110** and conductors **120** and **122** connected to the thermocouples **110** (FIG. **8**) act as heat sinks to transfer thermal energy away from the jaws, thereby making it difficult to account accu-

rately for the amount of energy delivered to the vessel **21** and that amount of energy dissipated to the instrument **22**. As a consequence, the temperature of the working surfaces of the jaws is a better indication of the important thermal variable for fusing tissue.

[0148] The temperatures of the working surfaces **38** and **40** must be sufficiently high to denature the collagen fibers at a temperature of about 60-70° C. and also high enough to denature the elastin fibers at a temperature of about 120° C., and to quickly obtain enough dehydration of the compressed tissue to achieve good reconstitution of the denature proteins chains and to maintain some resiliency or pliability of the sealed tissue while the cut occurs, all before the tissue becomes too dehydrated to permit good fusion. By delivering an impulse of power that can heat the working surfaces of the jaws to temperatures in the range of 220° C. to 320° C. and maintaining that temperature for a preferable time duration of about 1.5 to 2.0 seconds while the vessel is compressed for sealing and thereafter simultaneously cut, the collagen and elastin fibers are first denatured and then reconstituted across the interface **46** to create a strong seal and then the heat continues to force the sealed area to separate along the separation line **51** (FIG. **1**).

[0149] Because the electrical power is delivered for a short period of time, the heat generated by this power does not diffuse appreciably into the surrounding walls of the vessel. As a result, the walls adjacent to the seal remain substantially unaffected by thermal energy spread. The strength and capability of the adjacent tissue is not compromised to the point where it may contribute to a failure of the seal.

[0150] Sealing a vessel with an impulse of electrical power which elevates the temperature of the working surfaces to a set temperature of approximately 220° C. and maintains that 220° C. sealing and simultaneous cutting temperature for a time of about 2.0 seconds is illustrated by the graph shown in FIG. **16**. The temperature of the working surface on the upper jaw is referenced at **226**, and the temperature of the working surface of the lower jaw is illustrated at **228**. The temperatures in the upper and lower jaws are comparable to one another, due to the independent and rapid temperature control feedback of the controller **150** (FIG. **14**).

[0151] The electrical power is applied by the controller to the jaw heating elements beginning at the 0.0 time reference. The energy applied for an initial ramp up time increases the temperature of the working surfaces for approximately 0.7 seconds, at which time the temperature of the jaw working surfaces is approximately at the desired 220° C. set point temperature for the tissue fusion procedure. Thereafter, between approximately 0.7 seconds and 2.0 seconds, the controller **150** manages the delivery of electrical power to maintain the temperature of the jaw working surfaces at the set point temperature of about 220° C. A slight amount of temperature overshoot and undershoot occurs immediately after the transition from the initial temperature ramp-up to the desired set point temperature, but that slight oscillation of temperature is within an acceptable range of the desired set point temperature.

[0152] After the delivery of power is stopped at 2.0 seconds, the impulse of electrical power is terminated and the jaws are opened immediately thereafter to release the severed vessel. The annunciator **188** or the monitor **158** (FIG. **14**) indicates when the jaws can be opened to release the severed vessel. After the vessel is released from the jaws,

the sealed areas **50** (FIGS. **6** and **20**), which are adjacent to the separation line **51**, lack substantial mass to retain heat and cool rapidly when exposed to air. The jaws also quickly cool in the air after release of the tissue, but that cooling is not material to the invention and is therefore not shown in FIG. **16**.

[0153] Sealing a vessel with a 1.5 second impulse of power which achieves a jaw working surface temperature of approximately 320° C. is illustrated in FIG. **17**. Each of the top and bottom jaw working surface temperatures are separately referenced at **230** and **232**. The temperature rapidly increases from 0.0 seconds to the set temperature of about 320° C. in slightly more than 0.5 seconds. Thereafter, the delivery of electrical power to the jaw heating elements is controlled to maintain the working surface temperature at about 320° C. until 1.5 seconds have elapsed since the commencement of delivering the electrical power impulse. At that time, the electrical impulse is terminated and the jaws are opened to release the vessel. Again, the sealed areas, which are adjacent to the separation line **51**, cool rapidly upon being exposed to the air. The jaws also quickly cool in the air after release of the tissue, but that cooling is not material to the invention and is therefore not shown in FIG. **17**.

[0154] At temperatures of 220° C. to 320° C., the time duration of the power impulse must be relatively short to avoid damaging, destroying or substantially weakening the vessel. For example, maintaining the temperature of approximately 320° C. for 5.0 seconds has the effect of so dehydrating the tissue between the working surfaces of the jaws so that it becomes friable and brittle. Such characteristics make the sealed areas prone to break or crack and develop a leak and cause the separation at the sealed areas of the vessel to break or crack along an ill-defined and nonlinear path.

[0155] The staircase nature of the curves **226**, **228**, **230**, and **232** shown in FIGS. **16** and **17** result from a digital sampling routine of the PID controller. The discrete sampling points observed in FIGS. **16** and **17** are separated by significant amounts of time, but higher sampling frequencies are possible. Increasing the rate of sampling by the PID controller allows for better system control over such variables as overshoot and rise time.

[0156] The strength and integrity of the seals adjacent to the separation line **51** (FIGS. **6** and **20**) created by use of the present invention have been evaluated using burst tests. To evaluate the strength of the seal with a burst test, the lumen of the vessel is connected to a source of pressurized fluid, such as air, which inflates the vessel adjacent to the sealed area until a rupture or burst in the sealed area or the vessel wall occurs. The fluid pressure at the rupture point is measured, and the rupture pressure represents the strength of the seal. The test is repeated many times with different specimens of sealed tissue. A sufficient number of burst tests are conducted to achieve a statistically significant number of samples by which to evaluate the strength and integrity of the seals. The burst tests indicate that the seals formed have some range of variability in strength, and the seal strength is dependent upon the type and the size of the vessel sealed. Despite the variations in the seal strength, the burst pressures observed indicate that the seals formed have more than sufficient strength to reliably withstand the applicable physiological pressures, and in most cases, multiples of those pressures.

[0157] In addition to having a statistically higher and more consistent burst pressure, the typical failure mode of a seal made in accordance with the present invention is also substantially different from the edge-seal leak or mid-seal wall leak failure modes of seals made by use of the typical, known prior art tissue fusion devices which are presently in significant use. Typical edge-seal or mid-seal wall leaks are illustrated in FIGS. **17** and **18**, respectively.

[0158] As shown in FIG. **18**, a vessel **234** has been sealed at area **236** by a typical prior art technique. The view of FIG. **18** is orthogonal to the relatively large flat surface of the sealed area **236**. An edge **238** of the sealed area **236** delineates its boundary. An edge-seal leak occurs at location **240** when the edge **238** of the sealed area **236** ruptures through a wall **242** of the vessel **234** at a location adjacent to the sealed area **236**, under the influence of pressure applied in the lumen **244** on the left-hand side of the vessel (as shown). Usually the edge-seal leak **240** results from the application of excessive heat and compression concentrated at the edge **238** or over the entire sealed area **236**, or as a result of RF arcing which impacts the wall **242** of the vessel **234** and weakens the vessel at or near the edge **238**. The edge **238** may also be weakened by excessive compression from non-parallel jaws of a handpiece or from a 20 shearing action on the tissue at the sealed area when separating the jaws, as described above. The edge-seal leak **240** diverts fluid from the lumen **244** to the outside of the vessel **234**.

[0159] The typical mid-seal wall leak is illustrated in FIG. **19** where a vessel **246** was previously sealed at an area **248** by a typical prior art technique. The view of FIG. **19** is parallel to the flat surfaces of the sealed area **248**. The sealed area **248** was formed by compressing and fusing apposite walls **250** of the vessel **246**. Unsealed vessel walls **250** extend away from edges of the sealed area **248**. Under the influence of pressure applied in the lumen **252** on the left-hand side of the vessel **246** shown in FIG. **19**, the sealed wall portions of the sealed area **248** have started to separate due to the fluid pressure against the sealed area **248**. A remaining portion **254** of the sealed area **248** remains intact with the walls of the vessel sealed together. A mid-seal wall leak **256** occurs when the separated vessel wall of the previously sealed area **248** ruptures at **256** and allows fluid to flow from the lumen **252** to the exterior of the vessel **246**.

[0160] Both edge-seal leak **240** (FIG. **18**) and mid-seal wall leak **256** (FIG. **19**) create difficult medical problems. Usually, the sealed area has enough initial integrity to withstand the pressure of the fluid in the lumen of the vessel for a short amount of time, but continued blood or fluid pressure variations within the body cause the edge-seal leak or the mid-seal wall leak to occur at a later time, usually after closure of the surgical incision and completion of the entire surgical procedure. Post-operative internal bleeding will have severe consequences if the bleeding is not stopped quickly. Consequently, both an edge-seal leak **240** and a mid-seal wall leak **256** require undertaking a second surgical procedure to stop those leaks. Such second surgical procedures following immediately on the earlier procedure induce considerable additional trauma and risk to the patient.

[0161] The failure mode of seals created by use of the present invention when also simultaneously cutting the tissue, if failure occurs, is substantially different from the prior art edge-seal leak **240** and the mid-seal wall leak **256** shown in FIGS. **18** and **19**. Practical use of the present invention within its defined and preferred parameters has

never resulted in an edge-seal leak or a mid-seal wall leak, after creating many hundreds of seals. On a fundamental level, an edge-seal leak 240 or a mid-seal wall leak 256 results because the strength of at least part of the sealed area is greater than the strength of a part of the vessel adjacent to or within the sealed area, usually as a result of the adjacent vessel part or the sealed part being damaged during the tissue fusion procedure. The failure mode of the seals created by the present invention is considerably different, because the strength of the severed vessel adjacent to the sealed areas is not impacted to the point where the strength of the sealed areas is significantly less than the strength of the vessel adjacent to the sealed areas. The failure mode created by the present invention may be characterized as a mid-seal separation, and the mid-seal separation is of considerably less risk than either the edge-seal leak 240 or the mid-seal wall leaks 256, for the reasons discussed below.

[0162] The mid-seal separation resulting from the present invention, if such a separation occurs at all, is illustrated in FIGS. 20-24. As shown in FIGS. 20 and 21, the vessel 21 is sealed at the sealed area 50 and simultaneously cut at the separation line 51, according to the present invention. The sealed area 50 is formed by forcing portions 258 of the walls 44 of the vessel 21 into apposition with one another at the tissue interface 46 and by delivering heat to the compressed apposite portions 258 of the walls 44 at the interface 46. The separation at the separation line 51 is caused by continued heat application and force on the still-pliable tissue immediately following but as a continuation of tissue sealing which is sufficient to force the working surfaces 38 and 40 into contact with one another and thereby sever the sealed area 50 at the separation line 51. The temperature of the vessel wall portions 258 is sufficient to denature and coagulate the protein chains in the wall portions 258 at the interface 46 and then allow those denatured proteins chains to re-nature and reconstitute to form the high-integrity sealed area 50 while the continued force and temperature application causes the sealed area 52 separate along the separation line 51. The fusion of the wall portions 258 at the tissue interface 46 occludes the lumen 42 of both severed parts of the vessel 21.

[0163] After fusion of the wall portions 258 at the interface 46 in the sealed area 50 followed by simultaneous cutting of the sealed area 50 at the separation line 51, the application of fluid pressure within the lumen 42 on the left-hand side (as shown) sealed area 50 causes the severed vessel 21 to expand as shown in FIG. 22. The walls 44 of the vessel 21 stretch and balloon outward from an edge 260 of the interface 46. A characteristic of the seal created by the present invention is that the strength of the fusion at the interface 46 between the wall portions 258 at the sealed areas 50 is less than the strength of the unsealed walls 44 of the vessel 21 and is also less than the strength of the portions 258 of the wall after they have been fused together at the sealed areas 50. Even though the strength of the wall portions 258 after sealing may be somewhat diminished as a result of the heat and pressure application, the strength of those wall portions 258 is still greater than the strength of the fusion between the wall portions 258 at the interface 46, and the strength of the fused wall portions 258 at the interface 46 is still considerably greater than the normal amount of pressure applied within the lumen 42 by normal physiological events. These characteristics achieve a seal of substantial integrity which is capable of withstanding fluid pressures

which are considerably greater than normal, as shown in FIG. 22, but which also provides safety and reliability if the sealed areas 50 at the end of the severed vessel should experience a mid-seal separation.

[0164] If the fluid pressure applied within the lumen is increased beyond the exaggerated level shown in FIG. 22, the fused apposed wall portions 258 at the interface 46 began to separate from one another at the edge 260 without rupturing the vessel walls 44 adjacent to the sealed area 50 and without rupturing the separated wall portions 258 which had previously been fused together at the sealed area 50, as shown in FIG. 23. The pressure causes the sealed area 50 to experience a mid-seal separation, meaning that the previously-fused wall portions 258 separate at the interface 46. The pressure may continue to separate the previously-fused, apposed wall portions 258, with the separation continuing longitudinally along the interface 46. The separation may continue along the interface 46 until the entirety of the previously-fused wall portions 258 have separated, at which point the occlusion of the vessel 21 is eliminated and the vessel 21 opens completely as shown in FIG. 24.

[0165] Because the previously-fused wall portions 258 retain substantial natural strength as a result of the present invention, a rupture through the wall 44 of the vessel 21 is avoided. The entire sealed area 50 will separate in the manner shown in FIG. 24 under unusual circumstances, but neither the unaffected walls 44 nor the previously sealed wall portions 258 rupture to the exterior of the vessel 21 and create a leak from the lumen 42 to the exterior of the vessel, as is the case in a prior art edge seal leak 240 (FIG. 18) or a prior art mid-seal wall leak 256 (FIG. 19). The fluid-confining lumen 42 remains intact to confine the fluid within the vessel 21. Thus, even if the wall portions 258 at the sealed areas 50 separate, such a mid-seal separation does not result in a rupture of the vessel wall 44 to permit fluid to flow from the lumen 42 to the outside of the vessel 21. This type of mid-seal separation is the same as is created from simply fusing the tissue without simultaneously cutting the tissue, as is described in the first above-mentioned US patent application. The capability of sealing vessels in such a way to achieve a consistent and reliable mid-seal separation as a failure mode is thought to never before have been achieved from electrosurgical or electrothermal tissue fusion or from electrosurgical or electrothermal tissue fusion and simultaneous cutting.

[0166] The consistent and predictable mid-seal separation created by the present invention offers substantial advantages in redundancy. It is not unusual during surgery to create multiple sealed areas 270 and 272 which are slightly longitudinally spaced from one another along the length of a vessel 274, as shown in FIG. 25. The belief is that if the primary or upstream sealed area 270 ruptures or fails, the remaining secondary backup or redundant downstream sealed area 272 will hold, thus preventing a leak. This belief is prevalent even though a significant number of instances of failure of the upstream or primary sealed area are edge-seal leaks 240 (FIG. 18) or mid-seal wall leaks 256 (FIG. 19), also shown respectively in FIGS. 26 and 27. Under circumstances of an edge-seal leak or a mid-seal wall leak, the secondary or downstream backup sealed area 272 is totally ineffective to prevent fluid loss due to the rupture through the wall of the vessel upstream of the backup sealed area.

[0167] Thus, the perceived benefit of sequential primary and backup seals 270 and 272 created by prior art tissue

sealing techniques is almost always illusory. When the typical edge-seal leak **240** or the typical mid-seal wall leak **256** occurs at the primary sealed area **270**, as shown in FIGS. **26** and **27**, respectively, the leaks **240** and **256** divert the fluid from a lumen **276** of the vessel **274** to the outside of the vessel. Under such circumstances, the secondary or backup sealed area **272** has no ability to restrain the fluid within the lumen **276** because the leaks **240** and **256** have diverted the fluid away from the backup sealed area **272**. The backup sealed area **272** therefore has no ability and no utility to restrain bleeding under typical prior-art sealed-area failure-mode circumstances. The significant occurrences of prior art edge-seal leaks or mid-seal wall leaks, even if as low statistically as 20%, does not provide effective redundancy or backup.

[0168] On the other hand as a result of using the present invention as shown in FIG. **28** to fuse and simultaneously cut the tissue at a secondary or backup sealed area **50b**, a mid-seal separation at a primary sealed area **50a** still confines the fluid within the lumen **42** of the vessel **21** and conducts that fluid within the lumen **42** to the backup sealed area **50b**. The upstream primary fused area at **50a** may be conveniently created by use of the same instrument **22**, but only to fuse the upstream primary area **50a**. Tissue fusion without cutting is described in the first above-referenced US patent application. The strength of the vessel walls at the primary sealed area **50a** is sufficient to confine the fluid within the lumen **42** without rupture. Consequently, the fluid pressure is applied to the backup sealed area **50b** where that backup sealed area **50b** has the opportunity to provide effective redundancy to prevent fluid leaks from the sealed vessel **21**. Practical use of the present invention within its defined and preferred parameters has never resulted in an edge-seal leak or a mid-seal wall leak, after creating many hundreds of seals. Effective redundancy and backup is therefore achieved by the present invention.

[0169] Although the sealed areas created by the present invention normally have sufficient strength and integrity as to achieve a relatively low probability of failure, the beneficial use of multiple seals substantially diminishes the risk of internal bleeding, even when the secondary or backup sealed area is also simultaneously cut. Moreover, the substantially diminished risk of internal bleeding is enhanced by the reliability of obtaining consistent seals of high integrity with each fusion procedure performed in accordance with the present invention.

[0170] Another benefit of the present invention relates to the common practice of forming overlapping seals. An overlapping seal is formed from a first seal on a vessel in the typical manner, coupled with forming a second seal in which the sealed area of the second seal overlaps a portion of the sealed area of the first seal. Overlapping sealing is typically applied to seal large vessels where the perception is that additional energy is required because of the size of the large vessel. The second seal may overlap the initially sealed area by approximately 50% up to 100%. To do so, the first sealed area is compressed and heated again, along with any previously unsealed adjoining tissue depending upon the degree of overlap. A 100% overlap involves performing second sealing procedure entirely coincidentally with the initial seal.

[0171] The present invention is beneficial in performing overlapped sealing combined with simultaneous cutting because the heat created from the impulse of electrical

power does not dissipate to the surrounding vessel walls to a sufficient degree to damage the vessel. Reducing or minimizing the damage of the vessel walls adjacent to the seal allows subsequent applications of energy to be effective in reinforcing previous seals, because the vessel has not been previously damaged by the excessive application of heat. However, when the overlapping seal is created, the sealed area is also simultaneously severed by the application of heat. Thus, the present invention is effective in creating overlapping seals while simultaneously cutting the overlapped sealed areas.

[0172] The benefits and improvements of the present invention are numerous and significant. The efficiency of vessel fusion and simultaneous cutting procedures is increased by delivering the high power impulses which create the heat for fusion and cutting. Reliable vessel seals are created considerably faster than with the prior art tissue fusion techniques now commonly used, and the vessel is cut in such a way which does not compromise or negatively affect the strength of the seal created. The vessel seals are significantly stronger and more reliable than the seals created using common prior art tissue fusion or combined tissue fusion and cutting devices. The mid-seal separation failure mode confines the fluid within the vessel, thereby simplifying the process of re-sealing the vessel. Multiple sequential seals on a single vessel ensure that the probability of ultimate seal failure is extremely low because the mid-seal separation failure mode allows the multiple sequential seals to achieve effective redundancy, unlike known prior art tissue fusion or combined tissue fusion and cutting devices. Overlapping sealing and simultaneous cutting may also be beneficially applied because of the ability of the present invention to confine the energy to the sealed area without significantly spreading that energy to damage adjacent tissues and because the initial energy application has not substantially compromised the tissue strength or pliability of the sealed area. An immediate mid-seal separation allows the seal and simultaneous cutting procedure to be corrected.

[0173] The significance of these and many other improvements and advantages will become apparent upon gaining a full appreciation of the ramifications and improvements of the present invention. Preferred embodiments of the invention and many of its improvements have been described with a degree of particularity. The description is of preferred examples of implementing the invention, but the description is not necessarily intended to limit the scope of the invention. The scope of the invention is defined by the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of electrothermally fusing together pieces of tissue at an interface and simultaneously cutting the fused tissue along a linear path through the interface, comprising:
 - compressing the tissue pieces together at the interface sufficiently for fusing the tissue pieces together and for cutting the fused tissue pieces in the linear path through the fused tissue at the interface;
 - delivering an impulse of electrical power of no greater than 4.0 seconds time duration which contains sufficient energy to fuse the tissue pieces together at the interface and to simultaneously cut the fused tissue in the linear path through the fused tissue at the interface within the time duration of the electrical power impulse;

converting the electrical power impulse into thermal energy applied at the interface to fuse the tissue pieces and to simultaneously cut the fused tissue pieces in the linear path through the interface; and

regulating the temperature of the thermal energy applied at the interface in a range of 200° C. to 320° C. while fusing and simultaneously cutting the tissue pieces at the interface by controlling characteristics of the electrical power impulse.

2. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the electrical power impulse has a time duration of no greater than 2.0 seconds.

3. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the electrical power impulse has a time duration of approximately 1.5 seconds.

4. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the electrical power impulse has a time duration in the range of 1.5 seconds to 2.0 seconds.

5. A method as defined in claim 4, further comprising: releasing compression of the interface immediately after termination of the electrical power impulse.

6. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising: elevating the temperature of the thermal energy applied at the compressed interface at a rate of between 150° C. per second to 500° C. per second or greater from energy contained in the electrical power impulse.

7. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising: producing an energy density in the range of 388 W/cm² to 465 W/cm² of area of the compressed interface from the electrical power impulse.

8. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising: producing an energy density of at least 233 W/cm² of area of the compressed interface from the electrical power impulse.

9. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising: producing an energy density of at least 388 W/cm² of area of the compressed interface from the electrical power impulse.

10. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising: cutting the fused tissue pieces in a curved linear path through the interface.

11. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising: compressing the tissue pieces together at the interface to achieve essentially a zero thickness of the heated and compressed tissue pieces along the linear path.

12. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising: producing pressure of the least 0.88 N/mm² over the effective area of the fused interface while compressing the tissue pieces.

13. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising: compressing the tissue pieces at the interface by contacting the tissue pieces on opposite sides of the interface by working surfaces of jaws;

applying the thermal energy to heat the jaws; and transferring thermal energy from the working surfaces to the compressed interface of the tissue pieces.

14. A method as defined in claim 13, further comprising: forming electrical power impulse from direct current; and applying the direct current of the electrical power impulse to heat each jaw.

15. A method as defined in claim 13, wherein each working surface is formed of ceramic material and each working surface has a smoothness defined by an Ra of 0.40 microns or less.

16. A method as defined in claim 13, wherein each of the working surfaces extends in a dimension, and further comprising:

releasing compression of the interface after fusion and simultaneous cutting by moving the working surfaces away from the fused and cut interface with the dimensions of each working surface extending parallel to one another.

17. A method as defined in claim 13, further comprising: delivering an electrical power impulse to a heating element within each jaw; and

separately regulating characteristics the electrical power impulse delivered to the heating element within each jaw to regulate the temperature of thermal energy applied by the working surface from each jaw separately.

18. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising: releasing compression of the interface immediately after fusion without inducing shear forces on the fused interface.

19. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising: creating strength between the fused tissue pieces at the interface from the fusion which is less than the inherent strength of each tissue piece at the fused interface to allow separation of the tissue pieces at the interface before breaching the tissue pieces at or adjoining the fused interface.

20. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein pieces of tissue are apposite walls of a vessel, and the compressed tissue thickness sufficient to fuse the opposite walls of the blood vessel is 0.05 mm to 0.10 mm.

21. A method as defined in claim 20, wherein the vessel has a diameter of up to 8 mm.

* * * * *