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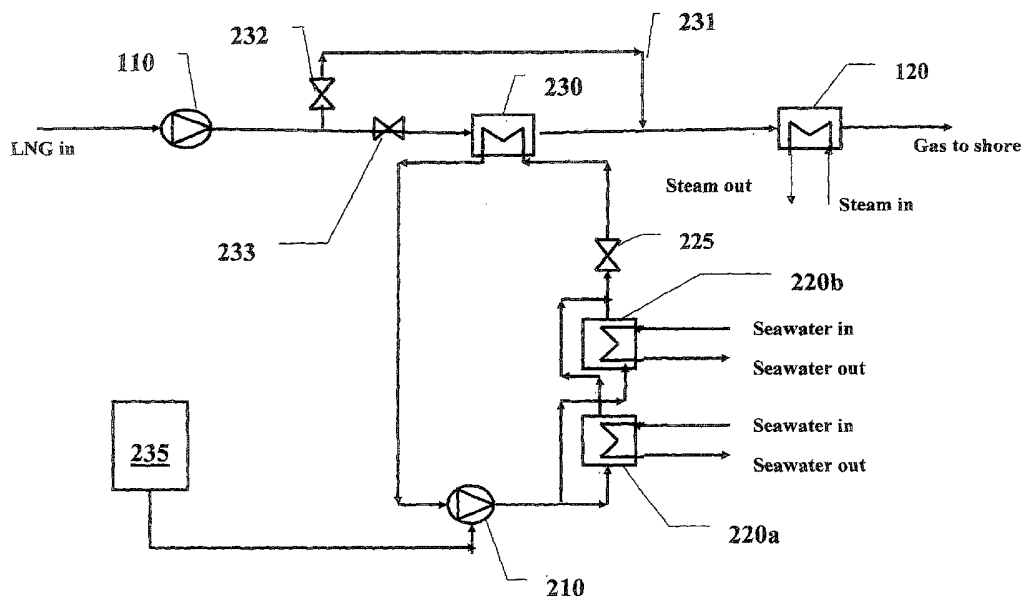
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- Published:
— with international search report
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- For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

(54) Title: REGASIFICATION SYSTEM AND METHOD



(57) Abstract: The present invention provides a novel regasification method and system in which the evaporative coolant is forced through an evaporation and condensation cycle, allowing control of the evaporative coolant condensation pressure; thus yielding a more flexible and more compact regasification system than those of the prior art.

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Regasification system and method

This invention relates to the field of regasification systems, and more specifically to a method and system for regasification of liquid natural gas (LNG), intended for installation on a seagoing vessels.

Natural gas exists in subterranean reservoirs throughout the world. This gas (i.e. methane) is a valuable commodity, and various methods and equipment exist for the extraction, treatment and transportation of this natural gas from its reservoir to the consumer. The simplest transportation means is a pipeline for conveying the gas in its gaseous state from the reservoir to the consumer. In many instances, however, the reservoirs are located in remote areas and/or areas with restricted accessibility, such that laying a pipeline is either technically very complicated and/or economically unprofitable. One very common technique for transporting natural gas from such areas, is to liquefy the natural gas at or near the extraction site, and transport this liquefied natural gas (LNG) to the market in specially designed storage tanks, often placed aboard a sea-going vessel.

The process of liquefying the natural gas involves compression and cooling of the gas to cryogenic temperatures (e.g. -160°C). The LNG carrier may thus transport a significant amount of liquefied gas to its destination. At this destination, the LNG is offloaded to special tanks onshore, before it is either transported by road or rail on LNG carrying vehicles or revaporized and transported by e.g. pipelines.

It is, however, in many instances more advantageous to revaporize the natural gas aboard the seagoing carrier before the gas is off-loaded into onshore pipelines. U.S. Patent No. 6,089,022 (Zednik et al.) discloses such a system and method for regasifying LNG aboard a carrier vessel before the re-vaporized natural gas is transferred to shore. The LNG is flowed through one or more vaporizers positioned aboard the vessel. Seawater taken from the body of water surrounding the carrier vessel is flowed through a vaporizer to heat and vaporize the LNG back into natural gas before this natural gas is offloaded to onshore facilities.

Zednik et al. furthermore cites the "TRI-EX" Intermediate Fluid-type LNG vaporizer as one vaporizer type capable of using seawater as the principal heat exchange medium. Such type of vaporizer is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 6,367,429 (assigned to Kabushiki Kaisha Kobe Seiko Sho) and comprises in principle a housing with a pre-heat section

and a final heating section. The pre-heat section has a plurality of pipes running through it which fluidly connect two manifolds which lie at either end of the pre-heat section, while the final heating section has also a plurality of pipes running through it which fluidly connect two other manifolds at either end of the final heating section. Seawater, which is collected directly from the sea surrounding the vessel, is pumped into a manifold and flows through the pipes in the final heating section and into the manifold before flowing through the pipes in the pre-heat section and into the manifold, from which the seawater is discharged back into the sea.

In operation, the LNG flows from a booster pump and into a looped circuit which is positioned within the pre-heat section of the vaporizer, which in turn contains a "permanent" bath of an evaporative coolant (e.g. propane) in the lower portion. The seawater, flowing through the pipes, will "heat" the propane in the bath, causing the propane to evaporate and rise within the precooling section. As the propane gas contacts the looped circuit, it gives up heat to the extremely cold LNG flowing through the circuit and recondenses to fall back into the bath, thereby providing a continuous, circulating "heating" cycle of the propane within the pre-heat section.

While the present regasification systems, like the one cited above, work well under given conditions, their use and applicability are nonetheless restricted by certain limitations and disadvantages. It is for example not possible to control the condensation pressure in the known systems. Furthermore, the evaporative coolant (e.g. propane) is in the known systems allowed to evaporate and condense in an unrestrained fashion; the heat transfer process is thus relatively slow and – in order to achieve optimum system efficiencies – large volumes are required. This often leads to the regasification systems being very large and requiring a great portion of valuable deck space.

It is therefore a long felt need for a regasification system which allows the condensation pressure to be more easily controlled, and a system which is more compact and flexible in operation than known regasification systems.

The present invention solves that need by providing a novel regasification method and system in which, when in operation, the evaporative coolant is forced through an evaporation and condensation cycle; and allowing control of the evaporative coolant condensation pressure; thus yielding a more flexible and more compact regasification system than those of the prior art.

These and other objects and features of the invention are provided by a method for regasification of liquid natural gas (LNG) aboard a floating carrier vessel before the LNG is offloaded as a gas, said method comprising:

- boosting the LNG pressure and flowing said LNG into an LNG/coolant heat exchanger in which the LNG is evaporated;

- flowing evaporated natural gas (NG) into an NG/steam heat exchanger, in which the NG is heated to before it is transferred to shore as superheated vapor;

wherein the LNG in said LNG/coolant heat exchanger is evaporated by thermal exchange against a coolant entering said heat exchanger as a gas and leaving said heat exchanger in a liquefied state;

said method being characterized by flowing said coolant in a closed circuit and through at least one coolant/seawater heat exchanger in which the liquefied coolant is evaporated before entering the LNG/coolant heat exchanger.

The invented method for regasification of liquid natural gas (LNG) aboard a floating carrier vessel before the LNG is offloaded as a gas, comprises:

- boosting the LNG pressure and flowing said LNG into an LNG/coolant heat exchanger in which the LNG is evaporated;

- flowing evaporated natural gas (NG) into an NG/steam heat exchanger, in which the NG is heated to before it is transferred to shore as superheated vapor;

wherein the LNG in said LNG/coolant heat exchanger is evaporated by thermal exchange against a coolant entering said heat exchanger as a gas and leaving said heat exchanger in a liquefied state;

said method being characterized by flowing said coolant in a closed circuit and through at least one coolant/seawater heat exchanger in which the liquefied coolant is evaporated before entering the LNG/coolant heat exchanger.

Certain embodiments of the invented method are defined in the dependent claims 2 to 10.

The invented method is accomplished by a novel liquid natural gas (LNG) regasification system for installation aboard a floating carrier vessel, said system comprising :

- an LNG/coolant heat exchanger for evaporation of the LNG;

- a booster pump for boosting the pressure in the LNG prior to entering the LNG/coolant heat exchanger;
 - a natural gas (NG)/steam heat exchanger for heating the NG before it is transferred to shore as superheated vapor;
- characterized by a closed circuit comprising at least one coolant/seawater heat exchanger for evaporation of the liquefied coolant before said coolant is flowed into the LNG/coolant heat exchanger.

Certain embodiments of the invented system are defined in the dependent claims 12 to 20.

An embodiment of the present invention will now be described in further detail, in order to exemplify its principles, operation and advantages. The description refers to the following drawings, not necessarily to scale, where like parts have been given like reference numerals:

Figure 1 is an exemplary perspective view of an LNG regasification system incorporating an embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a simplified schematic flow diagram of the regasification system of the present invention;

Figure 3 is a simplified flow diagram of one embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 4 is an isometric view of one embodiment of the present invention;

An embodiment of the regasification system according to the present invention will now be described in detail. The regasification system comprises basically two circuits: a coolant circuit and a natural gas circuit. Propane is often preferred as a coolant, but any fluid having an evaporation temperature of about 0 °C in the pressure ranges 2 to 25 bar may be suitable.

As shown in the figures, the LNG (e.g. methane) is fed from the onboard tanks (not shown) and into a cryogenic booster pump 110 which boosts the LNG pressure, and from which it is flowed into an LNG/coolant heat exchanger 230. Typically – for liquefied methane – the temperature upon entering the LNG/coolant heat exchanger is in

the order of $-160\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ at a pressure of about 50 to 130 bar. The LNG/coolant heat exchanger 230 may be a stainless steel type compact printed circuit heat exchanger (PCHE).

The natural gas (NG) leaves the LNG/coolant heat exchanger 230 in an evaporated state (for methane, at a temperature in the range of about -50 to $-10\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$), and enters an NG/steam heat exchanger 120, where the NG is heated before it is conveyed to shore as superheated vapor. In the case of methane, the vapor temperature is about $0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$.

The coolant circuit is selectively fed from a coolant supply 235, and driven by a pump 210 though at least one coolant/seawater heat exchanger 220a,b before it is fed into the LNG/coolant heat exchanger 230. In the heat exchange with the LNG, the coolant condenses and flows back to the coolant pump before it again is sent into the coolant/seawater heat exchanger(s) where it is evaporated.

The invented regasification system is thus based upon the coolant (e.g. propane) undergoing a phase change in the LNG/coolant heat exchanger 230 (condensing) and in the coolant/seawater heat exchanger 220a,b (evaporating). The coolant is at a higher temperature while heat exchanging with seawater. Unlike other regasification systems, the invented system forces the coolant through the coolant circuit, and it is also possible to control the pressure in the coolant by a valve 225, preferably positioned between the coolant/seawater heat exchanger(s) and the LNG/coolant heat exchanger 230. The temperature in the coolant condensate leaving the heat exchanger 230 is controllable by means of valves 232, 233 and a bypass line 231 on the LNG/coolant heat exchanger.

In one embodiment, the LNG regasification system may be installed on a Shuttle Regasification Vessel (SRV) or Floating Storage Regasification Units (FSRU). The regasification system and the heat exchangers are specially designed for marine installations and for cryogenic working conditions. The system is based upon proven equipment with extensive references.

Examples of heat exchangers suitable for the invented system, are designed for handling LNG with the following typical composition:

Composition (Mole %)	Standard liquid
Nitrogen	0.34 %
Methane (C1)	89.50 %
Ethane (C2)	6.33 %
Propane (C3)	2.49 %
Butane (C4)	1.26 %
Pentane (C5)	0.08 %
Hexane (C6)	0.0 %

In one embodiment, basic data input data may be:

LNG-Flow	: 200000 kg/hr
LNG inlet temperature	: -160 °C
Gas outlet temperature	: 0 °C
LNG inlet pressure	: max 130 bar
LNG outlet pressure	: 2 - 6 bar below inlet pressure
Inlet seawater temp.	: 14 °C

The coolant/seawater heat exchanger(s) 220a,b to heat the coolant (e.g. propane) against seawater are preferably plate heat exchangers or PCHE instead of shell and tube type heat exchangers.

In the described embodiment;

- the LNG/coolant heat exchanger 230 is an LNG/propane heat exchanger type stainless steel compact Printed Circuit Heat Exchanger (PCHE);
- The coolant/seawater heat exchanger(s) 220a,b are propane/seawater semi-welded plate heat exchangers in titanium, or PCHE or All Welded Plate heat exchanger;
- The NG/steam heat exchanger 120 is an NG/seawater shell and tube heat exchanger type; e.g. HamworthyKSE 305/424/120.3/2U Titanium.
- The LNG pump 110 is a cryogenic pump rated at 120 barg and 450 m³/hr;
- The coolant pump 210 is a propane pump rated at 560 m³/hr and maximum 2,5 bar pressure difference.

Referring to figure 3, showing a simplified flow diagram of one embodiment of the invention, LNG at maximum 130 bar and a temperature of $-160\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ enters the LNG/Propane PCHE heat exchanger. It leaves with a temperature of -50 to $-10\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ and enters the LNG/steam shell and tube type heat exchanger where it leaves as superheated vapor (5) with a temperature of approximately $0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$.

In the LNG/Propane PCHE heat is exchanged against propane circulating in a closed loop. The propane enters the PCHE at approx $0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ at 4,7 bar as gas. In the PCHE the propane is condensated, and leaves the PCHE as liquid at $-5\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$. This temperature is controlled with valves 232, 233 and a bypass line 231 on LNG stream to PCHE. The propane in the closed loop is then pumped by the circulating pump and heated against seawater in 2 off plate heat exchangers, semi-welded type in Titanium. In these heat exchangers, the propane is evaporated at about $0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ before it returns as gas to the PCHE.

Compared with the prior art, semi-welded plate heat exchangers are used between the propane and seawater and a smaller propane circulating pump (only one) may be used.

In semi- welded plate heat exchangers (or PCHE or all welded), propane will be evaporated at about $0\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$. The heat exchanger is similar to standard gasketed plate heat exchangers, but every second channel is welded. This makes it capable of handling aggressive medias like propane, and it still has the benefit of easy access for cleaning on the seawater side.

One suitable type of semi- welded plate heat exchanger is:

Make : Alfa Laval

Materials : Titanium

Design pressure : 16 barg

Design temperature : $-20\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ to $50\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$

Dimension (approx.) : L: 4, m, H: 3,2m W: 1,2m

The foregoing description and the embodiments of the present invention are to be construed as mere illustrations of the application of the principles of the invention. The foregoing is not intended to limit the scope of the claims, but the true spirit and scope of present invention is defined by the claims.

Patent claims

1.

A method for regasification of liquid natural gas (LNG) aboard a floating carrier vessel before the LNG is offloaded as a gas, said method comprising:

- boosting the LNG pressure and flowing said LNG into an LNG/coolant heat exchanger(230) in which the LNG is evaporated;
- flowing evaporated natural gas (NG) into an NG/steam heat exchanger (120), in which the NG is heated to before it is transferred to shore as superheated vapor;

wherein the LNG in said LNG/coolant heat exchanger (230) is evaporated by thermal exchange against a coolant entering said heat exchanger as a gas and leaving said heat exchanger in a liquefied state;

said method being **characterized by** flowing said coolant in a closed circuit and through at least one coolant/seawater heat exchanger (220 a,b) in which the liquefied coolant is evaporated before entering the LNG/coolant heat exchanger.

2.

The method of claim 1, wherein said coolant circuit comprises a valve (225) for controlling the pressure in the evaporated coolant.

3.

The method of claim 1, wherein said coolant temperature is controlled by means of a bypass (231, 232, 233) on said LNG/coolant heat exchanger.

4.

The method of claim 1, wherein the number of coolant/seawater heat exchangers is two.

5.

The method of claim 1, wherein the coolant is propane.

6.

The method of claim 1, wherein the coolant is a medium having a boiling temperature of 0 °C at any pressures between 2 and 25 bar.

7.

The method of claim 1, wherein the LNG/coolant heat exchanger is a stainless steel compact printed circuit heat exchanger (PCHE).

8.

The method of claim 1, wherein the NG/steam heat exchanger is an SS316 shell and tube heat exchanger.

9.

The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one coolant/seawater heat exchanger is at least one titanium plate heat exchanger.

10.

The method of claim 1, wherein the coolant is flowed through said circuit by a pumping means (210).

11.

A liquid natural gas (LNG) regasification system for installation aboard a floating carrier vessel, said system comprising :

- an LNG/coolant heat exchanger (230) for evaporation of the LNG;
- a booster pump (110) for boosting the pressure in the LNG prior to entering the LNG/coolant heat exchanger;
- a natural gas (NG)/steam heat exchanger (120) for heating the NG before it is transferred to shore as superheated vapor;

characterized by a closed circuit comprising at least one coolant/seawater heat exchanger (220 a,b) for evaporation of the liquefied coolant before said coolant is flowed into the LNG/coolant heat exchanger (230).

12.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein said coolant circuit comprises a valve (225) for controlling the pressure in the evaporated coolant, whereby the coolant evaporation temperature may be controlled.

13.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein the coolant circuit comprises at least two coolant/seawater heat exchangers (220 a,b).

14.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein said coolant temperature is controlled by means of a bypass (231, 232, 233) on said LNG/coolant heat exchanger.

15.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein the coolant is propane.

16.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein the coolant is a medium having a boiling temperature of 0 °C at any pressures between 2 and 25 bar.

17.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein the LNG/coolant heat exchanger is a stainless steel compact printed circuit heat exchanger (PCHE).

18.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein the NG/steam heat exchanger is an SS316 shell and tube heat exchanger.

19.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein the at least one coolant/seawater heat exchanger is at least one titanium plate heat exchanger.

20.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein the coolant is flowed through said circuit by a pumping means (210).

AMENDED CLAIMS

**[Received by the International Bureau on 24 February 2004(24.02.04):
original claim 12 cancelled; original claims 13 to 20 renumbered (3 pages)]**

A m e n d e d p a t e n t c l a i m s (pursuant to Art. 19 PCT)

1.

A method for regasification of liquid natural gas (LNG) aboard a floating carrier vessel before the LNG is offloaded as a gas, said method comprising:

- boosting the LNG pressure and flowing said LNG into an LNG/coolant heat exchanger(230) in which the LNG is evaporated;
 - flowing evaporated natural gas (NG) into an NG/steam heat exchanger (120), in which the NG is heated to before it is transferred to shore as superheated vapor;
- wherein the LNG in said LNG/coolant heat exchanger (230) is evaporated by thermal exchange against a coolant entering said heat exchanger as a gas and leaving said heat exchanger in a liquefied state;

said method being **characterized by** flowing said coolant in a closed circuit and through at least one coolant/seawater heat exchanger (220 a,b) in which the liquefied coolant is evaporated before entering the LNG/coolant heat exchanger, and by controlling (225) the pressure in the evaporated coolant.

2.

The method of claim 1, wherein said pressure is controlled by a valve (225) in the coolant circuit.

3.

The method of claim 1, wherein said coolant temperature is controlled by means of a bypass (231, 232, 233) on said LNG/coolant heat exchanger.

4.

The method of claim 1, wherein the number of coolant/seawater heat exchangers is two.

5.

The method of claim 1, wherein the coolant is propane.

6.

The method of claim 1, wherein the coolant is a medium having a boiling temperature of 0 °C at any pressures between 2 and 25 bar.

7.

The method of claim 1, wherein the LNG/coolant heat exchanger is a stainless steel compact printed circuit heat exchanger (PCHE).

8.

The method of claim 1, wherein the NG/steam heat exchanger is an SS316 shell and tube heat exchanger.

9.

The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one coolant/seawater heat exchanger is at least one titanium plate heat exchanger.

10.

The method of claim 1, wherein the coolant is flowed through said circuit by a pumping means (210).

11.

A liquid natural gas (LNG) regasification system for installation aboard a floating carrier vessel, said system comprising :

- an LNG/coolant heat exchanger (230) for evaporation of the LNG;
- a booster pump (110) for boosting the pressure in the LNG prior to entering the LNG/coolant heat exchanger;
- a natural gas (NG)/steam heat exchanger (120) for heating the NG before it is transferred to shore as superheated vapor;

characterized by a closed circuit comprising at least one coolant/seawater heat exchanger (220 a,b) for evaporation of the liquefied coolant before said coolant is flowed into the LNG/coolant heat exchanger (230), said circuit further comprising a valve (225) for controlling the pressure in the evaporated coolant, whereby the coolant evaporation temperature may be controlled.

12.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein the coolant circuit comprises at least two coolant/seawater heat exchangers (220 a,b).

13.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein said coolant temperature is controlled by means of a bypass (231, 232, 233) on said LNG/coolant heat exchanger.

14.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein the coolant is propane.

15.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein the coolant is a medium having a boiling temperature of 0 °C at any pressures between 2 and 25 bar.

16.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein the LNG/coolant heat exchanger is a stainless steel compact printed circuit heat exchanger (PCHE).

17.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein the NG/steam heat exchanger is an SS316 shell and tube heat exchanger.

18.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein the at least one coolant/seawater heat exchanger is at least one titanium plate heat exchanger.

19.

The regasification system of claim 11, wherein the coolant is flowed through said circuit by a pumping means (210).

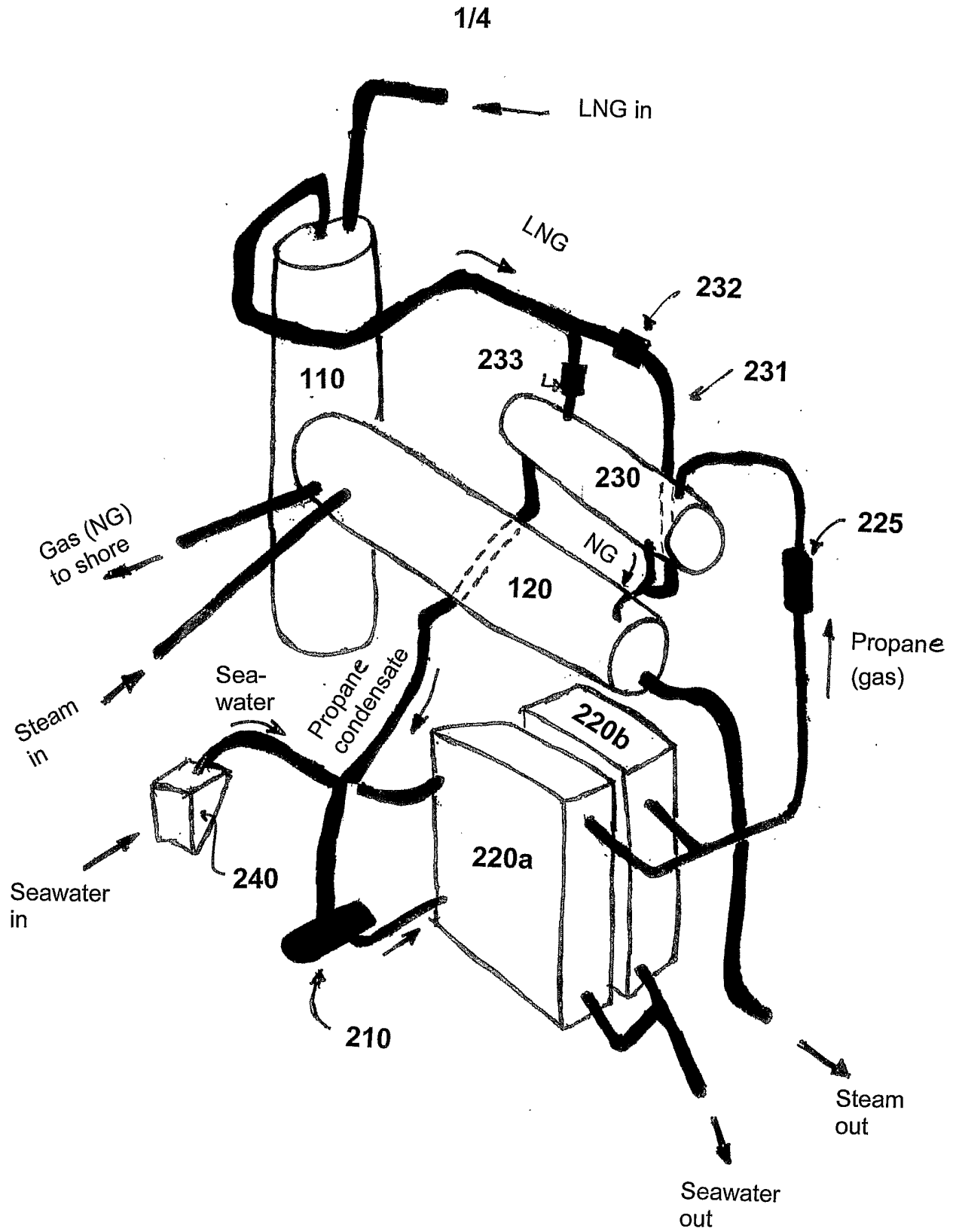


Figure 1

Figure 2

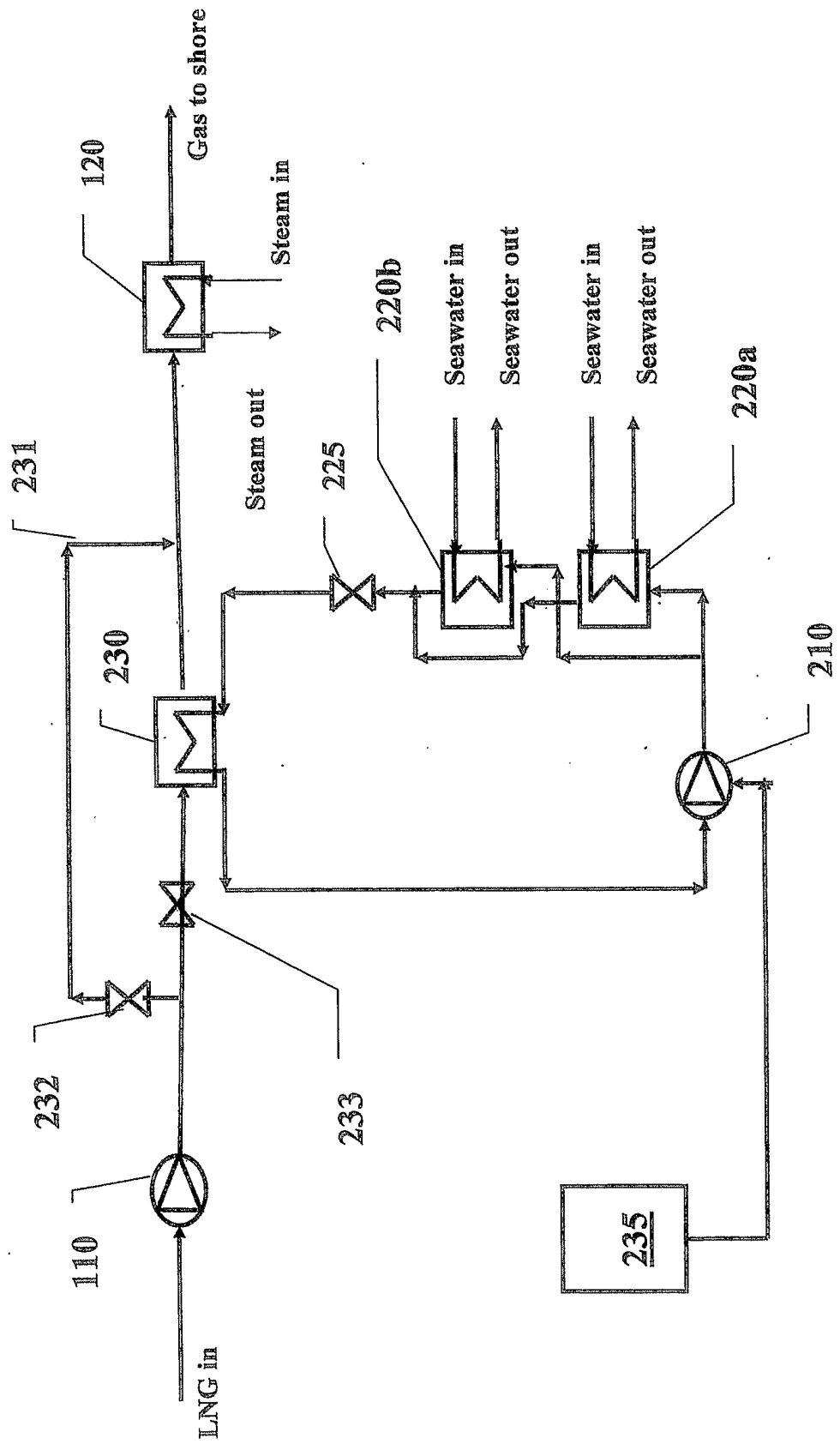
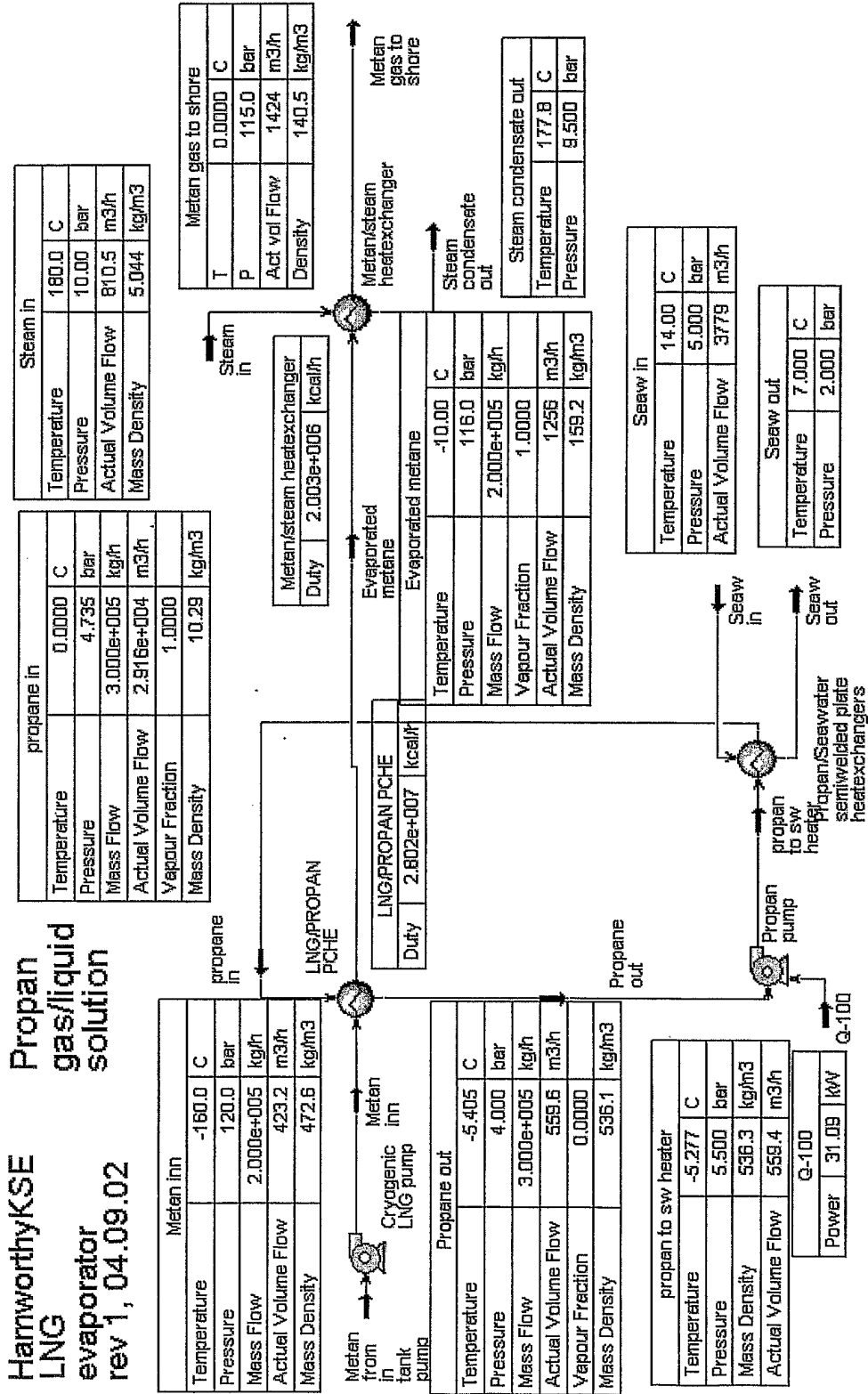


Figure 3



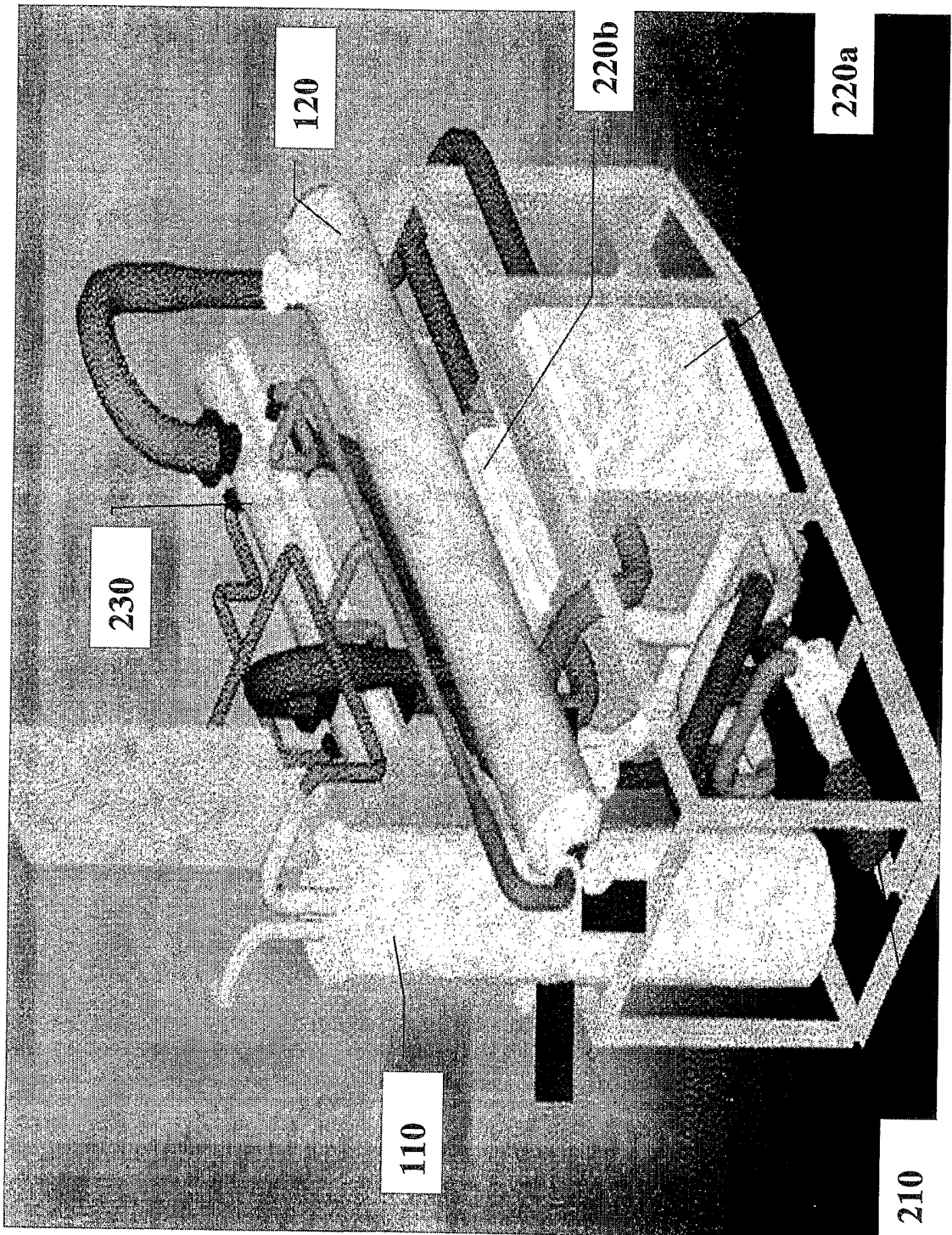


Figure 4

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/NO 03/00329

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC7: F17C 9/02, B63B 27/24

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

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC7: F17C, B63B

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

SE,DK,FI,NO classes as above

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

EPO-INTERNAL, WPI DATA, PAJ

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
PX	US 2003/159800 A1 (ALAN B. NIERENBERG) 28 August 2003 (2003-08-28) page 2 paragraph [0018]-paragraph [0021]; figure 2 --	1-20
Y	US 2002/134455 A1 (ROLF EMBLEM ET AL) 26 September 2002 (2002-09-26) abstract; page 2 paragraph [0020] --	1-20
Y	US 2975607 A (W.W. BODLE), 21 March 1961 (21.03.61), column 2, line 47 - line 61; column 3, line 45 - line 48; column 3, line 70 - column 4, line 17, column 4 line 35 - line 39 --	1-20

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

* Special categories of cited documents:

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

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

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

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"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

11 December 2003

Date of mailing of the international search report

30-12-2003

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/NO 03/00329

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 6089022 A (JAY J. ZEDNIK ET AL), 18 July 2000 (18.07.00), column 2, line 55 - column 3, line 40 --	1-20
A	US 2002/073619 A1 (WILLIAM PERKINS ET AL) 20 June 2002 (2002-06-20) abstract; page 1 paragraph [0014] --	1-20
A	US 4320303 A (ISAMI OOKA ET AL), 16 March 1982 (16.03.82), figure 1, abstract --	1-20
A	EP 0048316 A1 (UHDE GMBH), 31 March 1982 (31.03.82), figure 1, abstract -- -----	1-20

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

31/10/03

International application No.

PCT/NO 03/00329

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