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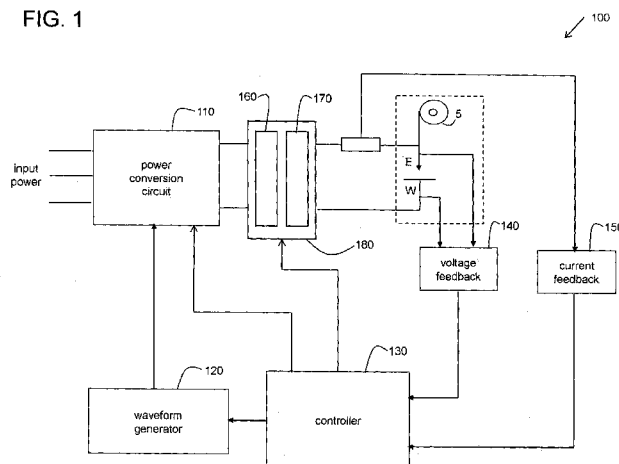
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(54) **Title:** SYSTEMS AND METHODS PROVIDING CONTROLLED AC ARC WELDING PROCESSES

FIG. 1



(57) **Abstract:** Systems and methods for providing controlled AC TIG arc welding processes is provided. In AC TIG arc welding power source embodiments, configurations of main and auxiliary bridge circuits (160, 170) allow for the directional switching of the output welding current through the welding output circuit path and selectively provide one or more high impedance paths to rapidly decay the arc current. The high impedance path aids in the low spatter transfer of molten metal balls from consumable to a workpiece (W), via an arc generated by a tungsten electrode (E), and further aids in the maintaining or the re-establishing of an arc between the tungsten electrode (E) and the workpiece (W) during welding.

SYSTEMS AND METHODS PROVIDING CONTROLLED AC ARC WELDING PROCESSES**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION****Priority**

5 [01] The present application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Application No. 13/625,188, filed on September 24, 2012, the entire disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference, in its entirety.

Field of the Invention

10 [02] The invention relates to a TIG welding power source. Certain embodiments of the present invention relate to arc welding. More particularly, certain embodiments of the present invention relate to systems and methods for providing controlled AC arc welding processes, and in particular AC TIG welding processes.

Description of the Related Art

15 [03] Certain prior art welding systems use bridge topologies in a welding power source to provide AC welding capability. A half-bridge topology may be used in a welding power source having dual output current paths configured to share a common path, such that each output can induce a flow of opposite polarity in the shared path. In practice, many welding power sources are configured as such and may require only the addition of a second set of rectifier devices to complete the second path. A switch may be placed in the non-shared path of each power source leg and the direction of current flow through a connected welding output circuit path is determined by the active leg. 20 A full bridge topology may be used with just about any power source topology, providing flexibility and the potential to be added to existing designed power sources. The full bridge topology allows easy implementation of zero cross assisting circuits. A blocking diode may be used to protect the devices in the power source from high voltage transients that occur during the zero cross.

25 [04] For certain short circuit transfer welding processes such as, for example, a surface tension transfer process, the output current must decay rapidly to specific values at certain points in the process. Techniques have been applied in the prior art to achieve such rapid reductions in output current in DC positive and DC negative applications. However, the ability to rapidly reduce the output current in both positive and negative directions in an AC arc welding process, while keeping 30 leakage currents and spatter to a minimum and while allowing an arc to easily re-establish between

a consumable electrode and a workpiece after the transfer of a molten metal ball from the electrode to the workpiece, is a challenging problem. This is especially true in TIG (tungsten-inert-gas) welding operations, where peak current and frequency limitations are encountered.

[05] Further limitations and disadvantages of conventional, traditional, and proposed approaches will become apparent to one of skill in the art, through comparison of such systems and methods with embodiments of the present invention as set forth in the remainder of the present application with reference to the drawings.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[06] Embodiments of the present invention are directed to systems and methods for AC TIG welding with an AC TIG welding power source comprising a power conversion circuit configured to convert an input current to an output current and a main bridge circuit operatively connected to the power conversion circuit and configured to switch a direction of the output current through a welding output circuit path operatively connected to a welding output of the welding power source at the command of a controller of the welding power source. The power supply also has an auxiliary bridge circuit operatively connected to the main bridge circuit and configured to introduce a high impedance path between the power conversion circuit and the welding output circuit path at the command of the controller of the welding power source. The power supply provides a welding output current which is an AC output current having a plurality of positive portions and negative portions and wherein the welding output current has a frequency of at least 1 KHz, and an average current output of at least 100 amps. Further embodiments and features of the invention are given in the description, claims and drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[07] The above and/or other aspects of the invention will be more apparent by describing in detail exemplary embodiments of the invention with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

[08] Fig. 1 illustrates a schematic block diagram of an exemplary embodiment of a welding power source operatively connected to a consumable welding electrode and a workpiece;

[09] Fig. 2 illustrates an exemplary embodiment of a welding output current waveform;

[10] Fig. 3 illustrates a schematic diagram of a first exemplary embodiment of a portion of the welding power source of Fig. 1 having a main bridge circuit and an auxiliary bridge circuit;

[11] Figs. 4A-4B illustrate the operation of the portion of the welding power source in Fig. 3 when implementing an AC version of the welding output current waveform of Fig. 2;

5 [12] Fig. 5 illustrates a schematic diagram of a second exemplary embodiment of a portion of the welding power source of Fig. 1 having a main bridge circuit and an auxiliary bridge circuit;

[13] Figs. 6A-6B illustrate the operation of the portion of the welding power source in Fig. 5 when implementing an AC version of the welding output current waveform of Fig. 2;

[14] Fig. 7 illustrates a schematic diagram of a third exemplary embodiment of a portion of the welding power source of Fig. 1 having a main bridge circuit and an auxiliary bridge circuit;

[15] Figs. 8A-8B illustrate the operation of the portion of the welding power source in Fig. 7 when implementing an AC version of the welding output current waveform of Fig. 2;

[16] Fig. 9 illustrates a schematic diagram of a fourth exemplary embodiment of a portion of the welding power source of Fig. 1 having a main bridge circuit and an auxiliary bridge circuit;

15 [17] Figs. 10A-10B illustrate the operation of the portion of the welding power source in Fig. 9 when implementing an AC version of the welding output current waveform of Fig. 2;

[18] Fig. 11 illustrates another exemplary embodiment of the welding power source shown in Figure 1, which is a TIG based welding power source; and

[19] Fig. 12 illustrates another exemplary embodiment of a welding output current waveform.

20 DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[20] Exemplary embodiments of the invention will now be described below by reference to the attached Figures. The described exemplary embodiments are intended to assist the understanding of the invention, and are not intended to limit the scope of the invention in any way. Like reference numerals refer to like elements throughout. The following are definitions of exemplary terms that
25 may be used within the disclosure. Both singular and plural forms of all terms fall within each meaning:

[21] "Software" or "computer program" as used herein includes, but is not limited to, one or more computer readable and/or executable instructions that cause a computer or other electronic device to perform functions, actions, and/or behave in a desired manner. The instructions may be

embodied in various forms such as routines, algorithms, modules or programs including separate applications or code from dynamically linked libraries. Software may also be implemented in various forms such as a stand-alone program, a function call, a servlet, an applet, an application, instructions stored in a memory, part of an operating system or other type of executable instructions. It will be appreciated by one of ordinary skill in the art that the form of software is dependent on, for example, requirements of a desired application, the environment it runs on, and/or the desires of a designer/programmer or the like.

[22] "Computer" or "processing element" or "computer device" as used herein includes, but is not limited to, any programmed or programmable electronic device that can store, retrieve, and process data. "Non-transitory computer-readable media" include, but are not limited to, a CD-ROM, a removable flash memory card, a hard disk drive, a magnetic tape, and a floppy disk.

[23] "Welding tool", as used herein, refers to, but is not limited to, a welding gun, a welding torch, or any welding device that accepts a consumable welding wire for the purpose of applying electrical power to the consumable welding wire provided by a welding power source.

[24] "Welding output circuit path", as used herein, refers to the electrical path from a first side of the welding output of a welding power source, through a first welding cable (or a first side of a welding cable), to a welding electrode, to a workpiece (either through a short or an arc between the welding electrode and the workpiece), through a second welding cable (or a second side of a welding cable), and back to a second side of the welding output of the welding power source.

[25] "Welding cable", as used herein, refers to the electrical cable that may be connected between a welding power source and a welding electrode and workpiece (e.g. through a welding wire feeder) to provide electrical power to create an arc between the welding electrode and the workpiece.

[26] "Welding output", as used herein, may refer to the electrical output circuitry or output port or terminals of a welding power source, or to the electrical power, voltage, or current provided by the electrical output circuitry or output port of a welding power source.

[27] "Computer memory", as used herein, refers to a storage device configured to store digital data or information which can be retrieved by a computer or processing element.

[28] "Controller", as used herein, refers to the logic circuitry and/or processing elements and associated software or program involved in controlling a welding power source.

[29] The terms "signal", "data", and "information" may be used interchangeably herein and may be in digital or analog form.

5 [30] The term "AC welding" is used generally herein and may refer to actual AC welding, DC welding in both positive and negative polarities, variable polarity welding, and other hybrid welding processes.

[31] Fig. 1 illustrates a schematic block diagram of an exemplary embodiment of a welding power source 100 operatively connected to a consumable welding electrode E and a workpiece W.

10 The welding power source 100 includes a power conversion circuit 110 providing welding output power between the welding electrode E and the workpiece W. The power conversion circuit 110 may be transformer based with a half bridge output topology. For example, the power conversion circuit 110 may be of an inverter type that includes an input power side and an output power side, for example, as delineated by the primary and secondary sides, respectively, of a welding transformer.

15 Other types of power conversion circuits are possible as well such as, for example, a chopper type having a DC output topology. A wire feeder 5 feeds the consumable wire welding electrode E toward the workpiece W. The wire feeder 5, the consumable welding electrode E, and the workpiece W are not part of the welding power source 100 but may be operatively connected to the welding power source 100 via a welding output cable.

20 [32] The welding system 100 shown in Figure 1 is generally depicted as a MIG type welding system. However, exemplary embodiments of the welding system 100 can also be TIG type welding systems, where the welding waveform is directed to the TIG electrode and not the consumable E as shown in Figure 1. Such systems are generally known and need not be described in detail herein.

[33] The welding power source 100 further includes a waveform generator 120 and a controller
25 130. The waveform generator 120 generates welding waveforms at the command of the controller 130. A waveform generated by the waveform generator 120 modulates the output of the power conversion circuit 110 to produce the welding output current between the electrode E and the workpiece W.

[34] The welding power source 100 may further include a voltage feedback circuit 140 and a current feedback circuit 150 to monitor the welding output voltage and current between the electrode E and the workpiece W and provide the monitored voltage and current back to the controller 130. The feedback voltage and current may be used by the controller 130 to make decisions with respect to modifying the welding waveform generated by the waveform generator 120 and/or to make other decisions that affect safe operation of the welding power source 100, for example.

[35] The welding power source 100 also includes a hybrid bridge circuit 180 having a main bridge circuit 160 and an auxiliary bridge circuit 170. The main bridge circuit 160 is operatively connected to the power conversion circuit 110 and is configured to switch a direction of the output current through a low impedance welding output circuit path (including the electrode E and the workpiece W) operatively connected to a welding output of the welding power source 100 at the command of the controller 130. The auxiliary bridge circuit is operatively connected to the main bridge circuit and is configured to introduce a high impedance path between the power conversion circuit 110 and the welding output circuit path at the command of the controller 130. In accordance with one embodiment, the high impedance path mimics the low impedance path in the sense of the provided direction (polarity) of the output current through the welding output circuit path. Detailed examples and operation of such hybrid bridge circuits are described in detail later herein.

[36] Fig. 2 illustrates an exemplary embodiment of a welding output current waveform 200. The waveform 200 is designed for use in a short circuit transfer welding process known as a surface tension transfer (STT) process. The waveform 200 includes a background current section 210, a pinch current section 220, a peak current section 230, and a tail-out current section 240. In between the background current section 210 and the pinch current section 220 is a first low current transition section 215. Also, in between the pinch current section 220 and the peak current section 230 is a second low current transition section 225.

[37] During a welding operation using the waveform 200, during time A as illustrated in Fig. 2 (i.e., during the background current section 210), a molten metal ball 250 is produced at the end of a consumable welding electrode 260. During time B as illustrated in Fig. 2 (i.e., during the first low current transition section 215), the molten metal ball 260 shorts to the workpiece 270 and the current is reduced, allowing the molten metal ball 250 to wet into a puddle on the workpiece 270. During

time C as illustrated in Fig. 2 (i.e., during the pinch current section 220), a ramped pinch current is applied to the short to help the molten metal ball 250 pinch off from the end of the electrode 260 into the puddle on the workpiece 270. During time D as illustrated in Fig. 2 (i.e., during the second low current transition section 225), the current is reduced, allowing a welding arc 280 to easily re-
5 establish between the electrode 260 and the workpiece 270 after the molten metal ball 250 has pinched off from the electrode 260, clearing the short. During time E as illustrated in Fig. 2 (i.e., during the peak current section 230), peak current is applied to set the proper arc length of the re-established arc and to begin melting a new molten metal ball from the end of the electrode. During the tail-out current section 240, generated heat is controlled by controlling the rate at which the cur-
10 rent transitions from a peak current level to a background current level. The waveform repeats during the welding process to form a weld.

[38] As an example, a background current of 100 amps maintains the arc between the electrode and the workpiece and contributes to base metal heating. After the electrode initially shorts to the weld pool on the workpiece, the current is quickly reduced to ensure a solid short. The pinch
15 current is then applied to squeeze molten metal down into the weld pool while monitoring the necking of the liquid bridge from electrical signals. When the liquid bridge is about to break, the power source reacts by reducing the current to about 50 amps. Immediately following the arc re-establishment, a peak current is applied to produce plasma force, pushing down the weld pool to prevent accidental shorting and to heat the puddle and the weld joint. The exponential tail-out sec-
20 tion is adjusted to regulate overall heat input and the background current section serves as a fine heat control.

[39] In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the currents of the first low current transition section 215 and the second low current transition section 225 are quickly reduced and regulated to a non-zero level, being closer to a zero current level than the level of the back-
25 ground current section 210, by switching the welding output current waveform 200 through a high impedance path within the welding power source 100. By reducing the current quickly and regulating to a low non-zero level, spatter is reduced, low spatter transfer of the molten metal ball is facilitated, and the arc 280 is readily re-established between the electrode 260 and the workpiece 270 in a reliable manner. Embodiments of the present invention provide a hybrid bridge circuit being under

the control of the controller 130 to switch in the high impedance path at the appropriate times while providing AC welding operation, as described in detail below herein. Certain aspects of the methods described herein may also be applied to nonshorting welding processes, where the molten metal ball breaks free of the electrode before touching the workpiece and transfers across the arc without the arc being extinguished. In such non-shorting welding processes, the high impedance path of the hybrid bridge circuit may be used to facilitate the low spatter transfer of the molten metal ball across the arc while maintaining the arc.

[40] Fig. 3 illustrates a schematic diagram of a first exemplary embodiment of a portion of the welding power source 100 of Fig. 1 having a hybrid bridge circuit 180 including a main bridge circuit 160 and an auxiliary bridge circuit 170. Also illustrated in Fig. 3 is a portion 310 of the power conversion circuit 110, where the power conversion circuit 110 is a center-tapped or half bridge topology (e.g., an inverter-based circuit). The hybrid bridge circuit 180 of Fig. 3 is in the form of a half bridge topology where the power conversion circuit 110 provides dual output current paths configured to share a common path, such that each output path can induce a flow of opposite polarity in the shared path. The main bridge circuit 160 includes switching transistors 311 and 312. The auxiliary bridge circuit 170 includes switching transistors 313 and 314, and resistor 315. In accordance with an embodiment, the switching transistors are insulated gate bipolar transistors (IGBTs). An active snubber 181 is used to limit the voltage across the bridge circuit 180 (e.g., somewhere between 300 V and 600 V) to cause the output current through the output circuit path to fall quickly. The hybrid bridge circuit 180 of Fig. 3 provides for AC welding operation and provides a high impedance path to regulate the welding output current to a low level for spatter control and to re-establish the welding arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W at certain time intervals during the welding process, as described herein with respect to Fig. 2 and Figs. 4A-4B. Welding output terminals 191 and 192 are shown and represent the welding output of the welding power source to which the electrode E and the workpiece W may be connected through a welding cable path.

[41] Figs. 4A-4B illustrate the operation of the portion of the welding power source in Fig. 3 when implementing an AC version of the welding output current waveform 200 of Fig. 2. Fig. 4A illustrates operation of the circuit of Fig. 3 during a positive portion of the welding output current waveform 200. During times of the background current section 210, the pinch current section 220,

the peak current section 230, and the tail-out current section 240 (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the top portion of Fig. 4A), the switching transistor 311 of the main bridge circuit 160 is ON and the switching transistor 312 of the main bridge circuit 160 is OFF. As a result, the welding output current flows as indicated by the solid arrows in the top portion of Fig. 4A through a low impedance path.

[42] During the times of current decay and the low current transition sections 215 and 225 (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the bottom portion of Fig. 4A), only the switching transistor 313 of the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 is ON. As a result, the welding output current flows through the high impedance path provided by the switching transistor 313 and the resistor 315 as indicated by the solid arrows in the bottom portion of Fig. 4A, providing a high potential drop between the electrode E and the workpiece W, thus allowing the welding output current to quickly decay and be regulated to a determined low level. This creates a high potential situation between the electrode E and the workpiece W, thus forcing the welding output current to quickly decay in accordance with the well known equation $V = L(di/dt)$ where V is voltage, L is inductance, di is change in current, and dt is change in time.

[43] In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, a value of the resistor 315 is less than two ohms (e.g., one ohm). In accordance with another embodiment, a value of the resistor 315 is less than one ohm (e.g., 0.5 ohms). Again, such quick decaying and regulation of the welding output current with the hybrid bridge circuit 180 provide for low spatter conditions and reliable re-establishment of the arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W. The load shown in Figs. 4A-4B represents the resistance and inductance of the arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W and the welding cable path connecting the electrode E and workpiece W to the welding power source (i.e., the welding output circuit path). The electrode E, workpiece W, and the welding cable path are not a part of the welding power source, however. Providing an auxiliary bridge circuit 170 to the main bridge circuit 160 allows better control of the interruption of welding output current through the load.

[44] Similarly, Fig. 4B illustrates operation of the circuit of Fig. 3 during a negative portion of the welding current waveform. During times of the background current section 210, the pinch current section 220, the peak current section 230, and the tail-out current section 240 (shown by the bolded

portion of the waveform in the top portion of Fig. 4B), the switching transistor 312 of the main bridge circuit 160 is ON and the switching transistor 311 of the main bridge circuit 160 is OFF. As a result, the welding output current flows as indicated by the solid arrows in the top portion of Fig. 4B. During the times of current decay and the low current transition sections 215 and 225 (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the bottom portion of Fig. 4B), only the switching transistor 314 of the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 is ON. As a result, the welding output current flows through the high impedance path provided by the switching transistor 314 and the resistor 315 as indicated by the solid arrows in the bottom portion of Fig. 4B, providing a high potential drop between the electrode E and the workpiece W, thus allowing the welding output current to quickly decay and be regulated to a determined low level. Again, such quick decaying and regulation of the welding output current provides for low spatter conditions and reliable re-establishment of the arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the switching transistors are controlled (turned ON and OFF) by the controller 130.

[45] In accordance with certain embodiments, the high impedance path mimics the low impedance path in the sense of the provided direction (polarity) of the currents through the hybrid bridge circuit. That is, the auxiliary bridge follows the polarity of the main bridge and, at certain times, the main bridge is interrupted to introduce the high impedance path provided by the auxiliary bridge. Such mimicking may be accomplished by switching corresponding transistors of the main bridge circuit and the auxiliary bridge circuit in the same manner at the same time. Furthermore, such mimicking may ease the transition to the high impedance path and/or provide for more efficient timing and switching. However, other embodiments may unlink the polarity following nature of the auxiliary bridge circuit to the main bridge circuit.

[46] In general, during transfer of a molten metal ball 250, the main bridge circuit 160 opens, leaving the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 to provide a high impedance path without interrupting current flow. Without the auxiliary bridge circuit 170, the main bridge circuit 160 would have to be completely interrupted such that the only decay path would be through the active snubber 181, allowing the welding output current to fall to zero. Such operation without the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 would not provide the reliable, controlled low spatter conditions and arc re-establishment that are desired.

[47] Fig. 5 illustrates a schematic diagram of a second exemplary embodiment of a portion of the welding power source 100 of Fig. 1 having a hybrid bridge circuit 180 including a main bridge circuit 160 and an auxiliary bridge circuit 170. Also illustrated in Fig. 5 is a portion 510 of the power conversion circuit 110, where the power conversion circuit 110 provides a DC + and DC – output (e.g., a chopper-based circuit). The hybrid bridge circuit 180 of Fig. 5 is in the form of a full bridge topology that may be used with almost any power source topology, providing flexibility and the potential to be added to existing designed power sources. The main bridge circuit 160 includes switching transistors 511, 512, 513, and 514. The auxiliary bridge circuit 170 includes switching transistors 515, 516, 517, and 518, and resistors 519 and 520. In accordance with an embodiment, the switching transistors are insulated gate bipolar transistors (IGBTs). An active snubber 181 is used to limit the voltage across the bridge circuit 180. The hybrid bridge circuit 180 of Fig. 5 provides for AC welding operation and provides high impedance paths to regulate the welding output current to a low level for spatter control and to re-establish the welding arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W at certain time intervals during the welding process, as described herein with respect to Fig. 2 and Figs. 6A-6B. Welding output terminals 191 and 192 are shown and represent the welding output of the welding power source to which the electrode E and the workpiece W may be connected through a welding cable path.

[48] Figs. 6A-6B illustrate the operation of the portion of the welding power source in Fig. 5 when implementing an AC version of the welding output current waveform 200 of Fig. 2. Fig. 6A illustrates operation of the circuit of Fig. 5 during a positive portion of the welding output current waveform 200. During times of the background current section 210, the pinch current section 220, the peak current section 230, and the tail-out current section 240 (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the top portion of Fig. 6A), the switching transistors 511 and 514 of the main bridge circuit 160 are ON and the switching transistors 512 and 513 of the main bridge circuit 160 are OFF. As a result, the welding output current flows as indicated by the solid arrows in the top portion of Fig. 6A.

[49] During the times of current decay (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the middle portion of Fig. 6A), only the switching transistors 515 and 518 of the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 are ON. As a result, the diode 505 becomes reverse biased, preventing the flow of current from

the power conversion circuit, and the energy stored in the load (due to inductance of the load) acts as a source of current. In general, the welding output current decays through two parallel circuits including the full bridge antiparallel diodes in the switching transistors and the auxiliary bridge resistors as shown in the middle portion of Fig. 6A. More particularly, the energy stored in the load dissipates by having the welding output current flow through the high impedance paths provided by the switching transistors 515 and 518 of the auxiliary bridge circuit, the resistors 519 and 520 of the auxiliary bridge circuit, and the anti-parallel diodes of the switching transistors 512 and 513 of the main bridge circuit as indicated by the solid arrows in the middle and bottom portions of Fig. 6A. This creates a high potential situation between the electrode E and the workpiece W, thus forcing the welding output current to quickly decay in accordance with the well known equation $V = L(di/dt)$ where V is voltage, L is inductance, di is change in current, and dt is change in time. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, a value of the resistors 519 and 520 is less than two ohms (e.g., one ohm). In accordance with another embodiment, a value of the resistors 519 and 520 is less than one ohm (e.g., 0.5 ohms).

[50] During the times of the low current transition sections 215 and 225 (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the bottom portion of Fig. 6A), again, only the switching transistors 515 and 518 of the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 are ON. Once the energy stored in the load has dissipated as described above, the diode 505 becomes forward biased and current flows from the power conversion circuit again. As a result, the welding output current flows through the high impedance paths provided by the switching transistors 515 and 518 and the resistors 519 and 520 as indicated by the solid arrows in the bottom portion of Fig. 6A, allowing the welding output current to be regulated to a determined low level.

[51] Again, such quick decaying and regulation of the welding output current with the hybrid bridge circuit 180 provide for low spatter conditions and reliable re-establishment of the arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W. The load shown in Figs. 6A-6B represents the resistance and inductance of the arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W and the welding cable path connecting the electrode E and workpiece W to the welding power source. The electrode E, workpiece W, and the welding cable path are not a part of the welding power source, however.

[52] Similarly, Fig. 6B illustrates operation of the circuit of Fig. 5 during a negative portion of the welding current waveform. During times of the background current section 210, the pinch current section 220, the peak current section 230, and the tail-out current section 240 (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the top portion of Fig. 6B), the switching transistors 512 and 513 of the main bridge circuit 160 are ON and the switching transistors 511 and 514 of the main bridge circuit 160 are OFF. As a result, the welding output current flows as indicated by the solid arrows in the top portion of Fig. 6B.

[53] During the times of current decay (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the middle portion of Fig. 6B), only the switching transistors 516 and 517 of the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 are ON. As a result, the diode 505 becomes reverse biased, preventing the flow of current from the power conversion circuit, and the energy stored in the load (due to inductance of the load) acts as a source of current. In general, the welding output current decays through two parallel circuits including the full bridge antiparallel diodes in the switching transistors and the auxiliary bridge resistors as shown in the middle portion of Fig. 6B. More particularly, the energy stored in the load dissipates by having the welding output current flow through the high impedance paths provided by the switching transistors 516 and 517 of the auxiliary bridge circuit, the resistors 519 and 520 of the auxiliary bridge, and the anti-parallel diodes of the switching transistors 511 and 514 of the main bridge circuit as indicated by the solid arrows in the middle and bottom portions of Fig. 6B. This creates a high potential situation between the electrode E and the workpiece W, thus forcing the welding output current to quickly decay.

[54] During the times of the low current transition sections 215 and 225 (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the bottom portion of Fig. 6A), again, only the switching transistors 516 and 517 of the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 are ON. Once the energy stored in the load has dissipated as described above, the diode 505 becomes forward biased and current flows from the power conversion circuit again. As a result, the welding output current flows through the high impedance paths provided by the switching transistors 516 and 517 and the resistors 519 and 520 as indicated by the solid arrows in the bottom portion of Fig. 6B, allowing the welding output current to be regulated to a determined low level.

[55] In general, during transfer of a molten metal ball 250, the main bridge circuit 160 opens, leaving the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 to provide a high impedance path without interrupting current flow. Without the auxiliary bridge circuit 170, the main bridge circuit 160 would have to be completely interrupted such that the only decay path would be through the active snubber 181, allowing the welding output current to fall to zero. Such operation without the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 would not provide the reliable, controlled low spatter conditions and arc re-establishment that are desired.

[56] Fig. 7 illustrates a schematic diagram of a third exemplary embodiment of a portion of the welding power source 100 of Fig. 1 having a hybrid bridge circuit 180 including a main bridge circuit 160 and an auxiliary bridge circuit 170. Also illustrated in Fig. 7 is a portion 710 of the power conversion circuit 110, where the power conversion circuit 100 is a chopper-based circuit. The hybrid bridge circuit 180 of Fig. 7 is in the form of a full bridge topology that may be used with almost any power source topology, providing flexibility and the potential to be added to existing designed power sources. The main bridge circuit 160 includes switching transistors 711, 712, 713, and 714. The auxiliary bridge circuit 170 is a partial auxiliary bridge circuit and includes switching transistors 715 and 716, and resistors 717 and 718. In accordance with an embodiment, the switching transistors are insulated gate bipolar transistors (IGBTs). An active snubber 181 is used to limit the voltage across the bridge circuit 180. The hybrid bridge circuit 180 of Fig. 7 provides for AC welding operation and provides high impedance paths to regulate the welding output current to a low level for spatter control and to re-establish the welding arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W at certain time intervals during the welding process, as described herein with respect to Fig. 2 and Figs. 8A-8B. Welding output terminals 191 and 192 are shown and represent the welding output of the welding power source to which the electrode E and the workpiece W may be connected through a welding cable path.

[57] Figs. 8A-8B illustrate the operation of the portion of the welding power source in Fig. 7 when implementing an AC version of the welding output current waveform 200 of Fig. 2. Fig. 8A illustrates operation of the circuit of Fig. 7 during a positive portion of the welding output current waveform 200. During times of the background current section 210, the pinch current section 220, the peak current section 230, and the tail-out current section 240 (shown by the bolded portion of the

waveform in the top portion of Fig. 8A), the switching transistors 711 and 714 of the main bridge circuit 160 are ON and the switching transistors 712 and 713 of the main bridge circuit 160 are OFF. As a result, the welding output current flows as indicated by the solid arrows in the top portion of Fig. 8A.

5 [58] During the times of current decay (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the middle portion of Fig. 8A), only the switching transistor 716 of the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 is ON. As a result, the welding output current flows through the high impedance path provided by the switching transistor 716 and the resistor 718 as indicated by the solid arrows in the middle portion of Fig. 8A, providing a high potential drop between the electrode E and the workpiece W, thus allowing
10 the welding output current to quickly decay. In accordance with an embodiment, the controller anticipates when the output current is approaching zero during current decay and turns a switch of the main bridge (e.g., switch 711) back ON. For example, the power source may use the current feedback circuit 150 to monitor the welding output current and provide the monitored current back to the controller 130. In general, during droplet transfer, the main bridge opens and the primary decay
15 path is through the partial auxiliary bridge and anti-parallel diode of the switching transistor 712 in the opposing main bridge leg as shown in the middle portion of Fig. 8A.

[59] During the times of the low current transition sections 215 and 225 (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the bottom portion of Fig. 8A), only the switching transistor 711 of the main bridge circuit 160 is ON, and only the switching transistor 716 of the auxiliary bridge circuit 170
20 is ON. As a result, the welding output current flows through the high impedance path provided by the switching transistor 716 and the resistor 718 as indicated by the solid arrows in the bottom portion of Fig. 8A, thus allowing the welding output current to be regulated to a determined low level. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, a value of the resistors 717 and 718 is less than two ohms (e.g., one ohm). In accordance with another embodiment, a value of the resistors 717
25 and 718 is less than one ohm (e.g., 0.5 ohms).

[60] Again, such quick decaying and regulation of the welding output current with the hybrid bridge circuit 180 provide for low spatter conditions and reliable re-establishment of the arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W. The load shown in Figs. 8A-8B represents the resistance and inductance of the arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W and the welding cable path

connecting the electrode E and workpiece W to the welding power source. The electrode E, workpiece W, and the welding cable path are not a part of the welding power source, however.

[61] Similarly, Fig. 8B illustrates operation of the circuit of Fig. 7 during a negative portion of the welding current waveform. During times of the background current section 210, the pinch current section 220, the peak current section 230, and the tail-out current section 240 (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the top portion of Fig. 8B), the switching transistors 712 and 713 of the main bridge circuit 160 are ON and the switching transistors 711 and 714 of the main bridge circuit 160 are OFF. As a result, the welding output current flows as indicated by the solid arrows in the top portion of Fig. 8B.

[62] During the times of current decay (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the middle portion of Fig. 8B), only the switching transistor 715 of the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 is ON. As a result, the welding output current flows through the high impedance path provided by the switching transistor 715 and the resistor 717 as indicated by the solid arrows in the middle portion of Fig. 8B, providing a high potential drop between the electrode E and the workpiece W, thus allowing the welding output current to quickly decay. In accordance with an embodiment, the controller anticipates when the output current is approaching zero during current decay and turns a switch of the main bridge (e.g., switch 713) back ON. For example, the power source may use the current feedback circuit 150 to monitor the welding output current and provide the monitored current back to the controller 130. In general, during droplet transfer, the main bridge opens and the primary decay path is through the partial auxiliary bridge and anti-parallel diode of the switching transistor in the opposing main bridge leg as shown in the middle portion of Fig. 8B.

[63] During the times of the low current transition sections 215 and 225 (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the bottom portion of Fig. 8B), only the switching transistor 713 of the main bridge circuit 160 is ON, and only the switching transistor 715 of the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 is ON. As a result, the welding output current flows through the high impedance path provided by the switching transistor 715 and the resistor 717 as indicated by the solid arrows in the bottom portion of Fig. 8B, thus allowing the welding output current to be regulated to a determined low level. Again, such quick decaying and regulation of the welding output current provides for low spatter conditions and reliable re-establishment of the arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W. In

accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the switching transistors are controlled (turned ON and OFF) by the controller 130.

[64] In general, during transfer of a molten metal ball 250, the main bridge circuit 160 opens, leaving the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 to provide a high impedance path without interrupting current flow. Without the auxiliary bridge circuit 170, the main bridge circuit 160 would have to be completely interrupted such that the only decay path would be through the active snubber 181, allowing the welding output current to fall to zero. Such operation without the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 would not provide the reliable, controlled low spatter conditions and arc re-establishment that are desired.

[65] Fig. 9 illustrates a schematic diagram of a fourth exemplary embodiment of a portion of the welding power source of Fig. 1 having a hybrid bridge circuit 180 including a main bridge circuit 160 and an auxiliary bridge circuit 170. Also illustrated in Fig. 9 is a portion 910 of the power conversion circuit 110, where the power conversion circuit 100 is a chopper-based circuit. The hybrid bridge circuit 180 of Fig. 9 is in the form of a full bridge topology that may be used with almost any power source topology, providing flexibility and the potential to be added to existing designed power sources. The main bridge circuit 160 includes switching transistors 911, 912, 913, and 914. The auxiliary bridge circuit 170 is a partial auxiliary bridge circuit and includes switching transistors 915 and 916, and resistor 917. In accordance with an embodiment, the switching transistors are insulated gate bipolar transistors (IGBTs). An active snubber 181 is used to limit the voltage across the bridge circuit 180. The hybrid bridge circuit 180 of Fig. 9 provides for AC welding operation and provides a high impedance path to regulate the welding output current to a low level for spatter control and to re-establish the welding arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W at certain time intervals during the welding process, as described herein with respect to Fig. 2 and Figs. 10A-10B. Welding output terminals 191 and 192 are shown and represent the welding output of the welding power source to which the electrode E and the workpiece W may be connected through a welding cable path.

[66] Figs. 10A-10B illustrate the operation of the portion of the welding power source in Fig. 9 when implementing an AC version of the welding output current waveform 200 of Fig. 2. Fig. 9A illustrates operation of the circuit of Fig. 9 during a positive portion of the welding output current waveform 200. During times of the background current section 210, the pinch current section 220,

the peak current section 230, and the tail-out current section 240 (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the top portion of Fig. 10A), the switching transistors 911 and 914 of the main bridge circuit 160 are ON and the switching transistors 912 and 913 of the main bridge circuit 160 are OFF. As a result, the welding output current flows as indicated by the solid arrows in the top portion of Fig. 10A.

[67] During the times of current decay (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the middle portion of Fig. 10A), only the switching transistor 916 of the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 is ON. As a result, the welding output current flows through the high impedance path provided by the switching transistor 916 and the resistor 917 as indicated by the solid arrows in the middle portion of Fig. 10A, providing a high potential drop between the electrode E and the workpiece W, thus allowing the welding output current to quickly decay. In accordance with an embodiment, the controller anticipates when the output current is approaching zero during current decay and turns a switch of the main bridge (e.g., switch 911) back ON. For example, the power source may use the current feedback circuit 150 to monitor the welding output current and provide the monitored current back to the controller 130. In general, during droplet transfer, the main bridge opens and the primary decay path is through the partial auxiliary bridge and anti-parallel diode of the switching transistor in the opposing main bridge leg as shown in the middle portion of Fig. 10A.

[68] During the times of the low current transition sections 215 and 225 (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the bottom portion of Fig. 10A), only the switching transistor 911 of the main bridge circuit 160 is ON, and only the switching transistor 916 of the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 is ON. As a result, the welding output current flows through the high impedance path provided by the switching transistor 916 and the resistor 917 as indicated by the solid arrows in the bottom portion of Fig. 10A, thus allowing the welding output current to be regulated to a determined low level. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, a value of the resistor 917 is less than two ohms (e.g., one ohm). In accordance with another embodiment, a value of the resistor 917 is less than one ohm (e.g., 0.5 ohms).

[69] Again, such quick decaying and regulation of the welding output current with the hybrid bridge circuit 180 provide for low spatter conditions and reliable re-establishment of the arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W. The load shown in Figs. 10A-10B represents the resistance

and inductance of the arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W and the welding cable path connecting the electrode E and workpiece W to the welding power source. The electrode E, workpiece W, and the welding cable path are not a part of the welding power source, however.

[70] Similarly, Fig. 10B illustrates operation of the circuit of Fig. 9 during a negative portion of the welding current waveform. During times of the background current section 210, the pinch current section 220, the peak current section 230, and the tail-out current section 40 (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the top portion of Fig. 10B), the switching transistors 912 and 913 of the main bridge circuit 160 are ON and the switching transistors 911 and 914 of the main bridge circuit 160 are OFF. As a result, the welding output current flows as indicated by the solid arrows in the top portion of Fig. 10B.

[71] During the times of current decay (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the middle portion of Fig. 10B), only the switching transistor 915 of the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 is ON. As a result, the welding output current flows through the high impedance path provided by the switching transistor 915 and the resistor 917 as indicated by the solid arrows in the middle portion of Fig. 10B, providing a high potential drop between the electrode E and the workpiece W, thus allowing the welding output current to quickly decay. In accordance with an embodiment, the controller anticipates when the output current is approaching zero during current decay and turns a switch of the main bridge (e.g., switch 912) back ON. For example, the power source may use the current feedback circuit 150 to monitor the welding output current and provide the monitored current back to the controller 130. In general, during droplet transfer, the main bridge opens and the primary decay path is through the partial auxiliary bridge and anti-parallel diode of the switching transistor in the opposing main bridge leg as shown in the middle portion of Fig. 10B.

[72] During the times of the low current transition sections 215 and 225 (shown by the bolded portion of the waveform in the bottom portion of Fig. 10B), only the switching transistor 912 of the main bridge circuit 160 is ON, and only the switching transistor 915 of the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 is ON. As a result, the welding output current flows through the high impedance path provided by the switching transistor 915 and the resistor 917 as indicated by the solid arrows in the bottom portion of Fig. 10B, thus allowing the welding output current to be regulated to a determined low level. Again, such quick decaying and regulation of the welding output current provides for low spatter

conditions and reliable re-establishment of the arc between the electrode E and the workpiece W. In accordance with an embodiment of the present invention, the switching transistors are controlled (turned ON and OFF) by the controller 130.

[73] In general, during transfer of a molten metal ball 250, the main bridge circuit 160 opens, leaving the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 to provide a high impedance path without interrupting current flow. Without the auxiliary bridge circuit 170, the main bridge circuit 160 would have to be completely interrupted such that the only decay path would be through the active snubber 181, allowing the welding output current to fall to zero. Such operation without the auxiliary bridge circuit 170 would not provide the reliable, controlled low spatter conditions and arc re-establishment that are desired.

[74] In summary, systems and methods for providing controlled AC arc welding processes are disclosed. In arc welding power source embodiments, configurations of main and auxiliary bridge circuits allow for the directional switching of the output welding current through the welding output circuit path and selectively provide one or more high impedance paths to rapidly decay the arc current. The high impedance path aids in the low spatter transfer of molten metal balls from a consumable electrode to a workpiece and further aids in the maintaining or the re-establishing of an arc between the consumable electrode and the workpiece when a molten metal ball is transferred.

[75] As described above, the various embodiments of the present invention can be used for various forms of MIG type welding including STT welding. However, the above described power supplies are not limited to MIG-type welding and can be used for TIG welding. Such a welding power supply is generally depicted in Figure 11, where the electrode E (when used) is separate from the consumable C and the output from the power supply 1100 is directed to the electrode and not the consumable C. Because such systems are generally known, a detailed discussion need not be provided herein. Furthermore, the discussions above regarding the power source portions shown in each of the Figures 3, 5, 7 and 9 are equally applicable to the power supply 1100 shown in Figure 11. The function, operation and construction of the above described embodiments are equally applicable to the power supply 1100. Accordingly, the power supply 1100 can be used for TIG welding and more specifically, AC TIG welding. Additionally, embodiments of the present invention can utilize systems and methodology disclosed in U.S. Patent Application No. 11/331,869, filed on January

17, 2006, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. Specifically, the systems and methods described therein which are directed to the generation and control of AC TIG welding signals is incorporated herein. For purposes of efficiency, the systems and methods disclosed therein are not repeated here.

5 [76] To aid in the following discussion an exemplary AC TIG current welding output in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention is shown in Figure 12. Figure 12 depicts an exemplary waveform 1200 having a positive portion 1201 and a negative portion 1203. The positive portion 1201 comprises a ramp up portion 1205, a peak current portion 1203, and a ramp down portion 1207. Similarly, the negative portion 1203 has a ramp up portion 1204, a peak
10 current portion 1206 and a ramp down portion 1208. The depicted waveform can be achieved with the power supply embodiments discussed above in a similar fashion to that described with respect to the waveform shown in Figure 2.

[77] In traditional AC TIG welding power supplies the respective ramp rates di/dt for the ramp down portions have been limited because of the construction of the power supply – this is due to
15 inductance in the welding system. Specifically, system inductance can tend to prevent current from rising or dropping too rapidly. Because of these limitations the maximum operation frequency for AC TIG welding has been limited, particularly at higher current levels, and particularly when the transition time becomes a significant proportion of the time spent in a particular polarity. This is because the current must be driven ever higher to attain the desired average or RMS current to perform the
20 required application. As this peak current is forced ever higher, the electrode tends to overheat, and can tend to spit tungsten from its surface. This occurs because of the need to have relatively high peak currents in the waveform, to obtain a desired average current level. Furthermore, as the peak current increases the maximum effective frequency decreases due to the rate at which current can be reduced due to inductance in the welding circuit. This loss of frequency tends to cause degradation
25 of arc focus and arc stability forcing users to reduce the speed of the welding process. Thus, tradition AC TIG welding power supplies are limited in this regard.

[78] Embodiments of the present invention negate the negative affects of system inductance, and forcing the current to drop from a high level to zero very quickly. This allows the welding cycles to spend more time at the peak current level. By spending more time at the peak current level, with

less time lost in transition, embodiments of the present invention can use a lower peak current level than traditional systems to achieve the same average current level. Thus, this allows the welding power supply 1100 to achieve an AC TIG welding process having improved performance with less tungsten spitting from the electrode. Similarly, because a higher operational frequency for the waveform 1200 aids in improving the focus of the welding arc it is desirable to increase the waveform frequency without decreasing the peak or average current of the waveform. Furthermore, with the improved ramp down rates the polarity of the current can be changed faster than in traditional systems. The improved ramp down rates allow the frequency of the waveform 1200 to be higher than that achievable by known AC TIG welding systems.

[79] For example, embodiments of the present invention can obtain a waveform frequency of at least 1 KHz while the average current for the waveform is at least 100 amps. In some exemplary embodiments a waveform frequency of 1.5 KHz can be achieved while the average current for the waveform 1200 is at least 100 amps. In further exemplary embodiments, the average waveform current is at least 100 amps with a frequency of at least 2 KHz. Additional embodiments can have higher average currents at high frequencies, and in some exemplary embodiments, the average current is at least 200 amps, while in other embodiments, the average current output is at least 300 amps. While in further exemplary embodiments, when the frequency is at least 1 KHz, the average current output is in the range of 200 to 300 amps, and in other embodiments the frequency is in the range of 1 to 2 KHz. In further exemplary embodiments, the welding frequency is in the range of 1 to 2 KHz, while the average current for the waveform 1200 is in the range of 200 to 400 amps. This performance has not been achievable in known AC TIG welding systems. Often the switching capabilities of the power supply will dictate the frequencies at which it can operate.

[80] Furthermore, as stated above embodiments of the present invention allow for the waveform 1200 to spend more time at the peak current levels, rather than using excess time ramping down from peak currents. Because of this, embodiments of the present invention allow for a welding system to output a waveform with an average current rate using lower peak levels than that of prior art systems. This is advantageous as it reduces tungsten spitting and extends the life of the tungsten electrode. In fact, embodiments of the present invention can output a welding signal having a peak to average current ratio at rates not previously achievable in AC TIG welding systems. Spe-

cifically, embodiments of the present invention can have a peak to average current ratio in the range of 1.09 to 1.004 at a waveform frequency in the range of 500 Hz to 999 Hz, and in some embodiments has a ratio in the range of 1.05 to 1.01 at a waveform frequency in the range of 500 Hz to 999 Hz. In other exemplary embodiments, at higher waveform frequencies, embodiments of the present invention have a ratio in the range of 1.2 to 1.04 at a waveform frequency of at least 1 KHz. In some exemplary embodiments, the ratio is in the range of 1.2 to 1.04 when the frequency is in the range of 1 KHz to 2 KHz. In some exemplary embodiments, the ratio is in the range of 1.15 to 1.05 at a frequency of at least 1 KHz, and in some embodiments when the frequency is in the range of 1 to 2 KHz. It should be noted that a ratio of 1.0000 is not possible as a true square wave cannot be achieved.

[81] It should be noted that the above peak-to-average current ratios are ratios determined by looking at the peak to average current ratios for respective portions of the positive portion 1201 and negative portion 1210, respectively. That is, the peak and average current values are not for an entire cycle of the waveform 1200, but are for the respective portions 1201 and 1203. It is further noted, that the above discussed peak-to-average ratio ranges are for both the positive and negative portions.

[82] Furthermore, as discussed previously, embodiments of the present invention also allow the power supply to output a waveform 1200 which is maintained at its respective peak current levels (1203 and 1206) for a longer percentage of time – again increasing the performance of the system.

Because of this, less waveform cycle time is lost in bringing the current down from peak levels back to 0 amps, and the waveform 1200 becomes more like a true square waveform. In exemplary embodiments of the present invention, the polarity peak current time-to-polarity cycle time ratio is in the range of 0.85 to 0.998 at a waveform frequency in the range of 500 Hz to 999 Hz, and in some embodiments can achieve a ratio in the range of 0.9 to 0.997 at a waveform frequency in the range of 500 Hz to 999 Hz. In other exemplary embodiments, at higher waveform frequencies, embodiments of the present invention can achieve a ratio of at least 0.7 at a waveform frequency of at least 1 KHz, and in other exemplary embodiments the frequency is in the range of 1 KHz to 2 KHz. In further exemplary embodiments, the ratio is in the range of 0.7 to 0.9 at a waveform frequency of at least 1 KHz, and in some embodiments in the frequency range of 1 KHz to 2 KHz. In further exemplary

embodiments, the ratio is in the range of 0.75 to 0.88 at a frequency of at least 1 KHz, and in other embodiments when the frequency is in the range of 1 to 2 KHz. This performance has not been previously obtainable in AC TIG welding systems. It should be noted that a ratio of 1.0000 is not possible as a true square wave cannot be achieved.

5 [83] It should be noted, that like the peak-to-average current ratios previously discussed, the polarity peak current time-to-polarity cycle time ratio is determined for respective portions of the waveform 1200. That is, the polarity peak current time-to-polarity cycle time ratios above are determined for both the positive portion 1201 and negative portion 1203, respectively. It is further noted that the above described ratios are for both the positive and negative portions of the waveform 1200.

10 Specifically, the polarity peak current time-to-polarity cycle time ratio for the positive portion 1201 is determined by the ratio of PP_t / P_t , where PP_t is the amount of time the positive current is above 95% of the peak current 1203 level of the positive portion 1201, and P_t is the entire duration of the positive portion of the waveform 1200. Similarly, the polarity peak current time-to-polarity cycle time ratio for the negative portion 1203 is determined by the ratio of PN_t / N_t , where PN_t is the amount of time the negative current is above 95% of the peak current 1206 level of the negative portion 1203, and N_t is the entire duration of the negative portion of the waveform 1200. The ratios are determined as defined above because embodiments of the present invention will often utilize a waveform where the polarity balance of the cycle is often not 50-50, but one polarity has a longer duration than the other. Of course, if a 50-50 positive-to-negative balance is utilized the peak time to cycle time ratio can be used where the peak time is determined by summing the time the current is above 95% of the peak time for each of the positive and negative portions ($PP_t + PN_t$).

25 [84] In appended claims, the terms "including" and "having" are used as the plain language equivalents of the term "comprising"; the term "in which" is equivalent to "wherein." Moreover, in appended claims, the terms "first," "second," "third," "upper," "lower," "bottom," "top," etc. are used merely as labels, and are not intended to impose numerical or positional requirements on their objects. Further, the limitations of the appended claims are not written in means-plus-function format and are not intended to be interpreted based on 35 U.S.C. § 112, sixth paragraph, unless and until such claim limitations expressly use the phrase "means for" followed by a statement of function void of further structure. As used herein, an element or step recited in the singular and proceeded with

the word "a" or "an" should be understood as not excluding plural of said elements or steps, unless such exclusion is explicitly stated. Furthermore, references to "one embodiment" of the present invention are not intended to be interpreted as excluding the existence of additional embodiments that also incorporate the recited features. Moreover, unless explicitly stated to the contrary, embodiments

5 "comprising," "including," or "having" an element or a plurality of elements having a particular property may include additional such elements not having that property. Moreover, certain embodiments may be shown as having like or similar elements, however, this is merely for illustration purposes, and such embodiments need not necessarily have the same elements unless specified in the claims.

[85] As used herein, the terms "may" and "may be" indicate a possibility of an occurrence within

10 a set of circumstances; a possession of a specified property, characteristic or function; and/or qualify another verb by expressing one or more of an ability, capability, or possibility associated with the qualified verb. Accordingly, usage of "may" and "may be" indicates that a modified term is apparently appropriate, capable, or suitable for an indicated capacity, function, or usage, while taking into account that in some circumstances the modified term may sometimes not be appropriate, capable, or

15 suitable. For example, in some circumstances an event or capacity can be expected, while in other circumstances the event or capacity cannot occur – this distinction is captured by the terms "may" and "may be."

[86] This written description uses examples to disclose the invention, including the best mode, and also to enable one of ordinary skill in the art to practice the invention, including making and using

20 any devices or systems and performing any incorporated methods. The patentable scope of the invention is defined by the claims, and may include other examples that occur to one of ordinary skill in the art. Such other examples are intended to be within the scope of the claims if they have structural elements that do not differentiate from the literal language of the claims, or if they include equivalent structural elements with insubstantial differences from the literal language of the claims.

25 [87] While the claimed subject matter of the present application has been described with reference to certain embodiments, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes may be made and equivalents may be substituted without departing from the scope of the claimed subject matter. In addition, many modifications may be made to adapt a particular situation or material to the teachings of the claimed subject matter without departing from its scope. Therefore, it is

intended that the claimed subject matter not be limited to the particular embodiments disclosed, but that the claimed subject matter will include all embodiments falling within the scope of the appended claims.

Reference numbers

5	wire feeder	516	transistor
100	power source	517	transistor
110	power conversion circuit	518	transistor
120	waveform generator	519	resistor
130	controller	520	resistor
140	voltage feedback circuit	710	portion
150	current feedback circuit	711	transistor
160	main bridge circuit	712	transistor
170	auxiliary bridge circuit	713	transistor
180	hybrid bridge circuit	714	transistor
181	snubber	715	transistor
191	output terminal	716	transistor
192	output terminal	717	resistor
200	waveform	718	resistor
210	background current section	910	portion
215	first low current transition section	911	transistor
220	pinch current section	912	transistor
225	second low current transition section	913	transistor
230	peak current section	914	transistor
240	tail-out current section	915	transistor
250	molten metal ball	916	transistor
260	welding electrode	917	resistor
270	workpiece	110	power supply
280	welding arc	1200	waveform
310	portion	1201	positive portion
311	transistor	1203	current portion
312	transistor	1204	ramp up portion
313	transistor	1205	ramp up portion
314	transistor	1206	current portion
315	resistor	1207	ramp down portion
505	diode	1208	ramp down portion
510	portion	1210	negative portion
511	transistor		
512	transistor	B	time
513	transistor	C	time / consumable
514	transistor	di	change in current
515	transistor	dt	change in time

E welding electrode
L inductance

V voltage
W workpiece

CLAIMS

- 1. A TIG welding power source (100) comprising:
5 a power conversion circuit (110) configured to convert an input current to an output current;
a main bridge circuit (160) operatively connected to the power conversion circuit (110) and
configured to switch a direction of the output current through a welding output circuit path
operatively connected to a welding output of the welding power source (100) at the com-
mand of a controller (130) of the welding power source (100); and
10 an auxiliary bridge circuit (170) operatively connected to the main bridge circuit (160) and
configured to introduce a high impedance path between the power conversion circuit (110)
and the welding output circuit path at the command of the controller (130) of the welding
power source (100),
wherein a welding output current of the welding power supply (100) is an AC output current
15 having a plurality of positive portions and negative portions and wherein said welding output
current has a frequency of at least 1 KHz, and an average current output of at least 100
amps.
2. The power source of claim 1, wherein said average output current is at least 200 amps.
20
3. The power source of claim 1, wherein said average output current is at least 300 amps.
4. The power source of one of the claims 1 to 3, wherein said frequency is in the range of 1 to
2 KHz, and said output current is in the range of 200 to 400 amps.
25
5. A TIG welding power source (100), in particular according to one of the claims 1 to 4, com-
prising:
a power conversion circuit (110) configured to convert an input current to an output current;
a main bridge circuit (160) operatively connected to the power conversion circuit (110) and
30 configured to switch a direction of the output current through a welding output circuit path
operatively connected to a welding output of the welding power source (100) at the com-
mand of a controller (130) of the welding power source (100); and
an auxiliary bridge circuit (170) operatively connected to the main bridge circuit (160) and
configured to introduce a high impedance path between the power conversion circuit (110)
35 and the welding output circuit path at the command of the controller (130) of the welding
power source (100),
wherein a welding output current of the welding power supply (100) is an AC output current
having a plurality of positive portions and negative portions and wherein said welding output

current has a frequency in the range of 500 to 999 Hz, and a waveform average current output of at least 100 amps, and

wherein each of said positive and negative portions of said waveform have a peak-to-average current ratio in the range of 1.09 to 1.004.

5

6. The power source of claim 5, wherein said peak-to-average current ratio is in the range of 1.05 to 1.01.

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7. The power source of claim 5 or 6, wherein each of said positive and negative portions of said waveform have a peak current time-to-polarity cycle time ratio in the range of 0.85 to 0.998, where for each of said respective negative and positive portions of the waveform the peak current time is the duration of time above 95% of the peak current level for said positive and negative portions, respectively, and said polarity cycle time is the duration of time of each of said positive and negative portions, respectively.

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8. The power source of claim 7, wherein said peak current time-to-polarity cycle time ratio is in the range of 0.9 to 0.997.

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9. A TIG welding power source (100), in particular according to one of the claims 1 to 4, comprising:

a power conversion circuit (110) configured to convert an input current to an output current;
a main bridge circuit (160) operatively connected to the power conversion circuit (110) and configured to switch a direction of the output current through a welding output circuit path operatively connected to a welding output of the welding power source (100) at the command of a controller (130) of the welding power source (100); and
an auxiliary bridge circuit (170) operatively connected to the main bridge circuit (160) and configured to introduce a high impedance path between the power conversion circuit (110) and the welding output circuit path at the command of the controller (130) of the welding power source (100),

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wherein a welding output current of the welding power supply (100) is an AC output current having a plurality of positive portions and negative portions and wherein said welding output current has a frequency of at least 1 KHz, and a waveform average current output of at least 100 amps, and

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wherein each of said positive and negative portions of said waveform have a peak-to-average current ratio in the range of 1.2 to 1.04.

10. The power source of claim 9, wherein said peak-to-average current ratio is in the range of 1.15 to 1.04.

11. The power source of claim 9 or 10, wherein each of said positive and negative portions of said waveform have a peak current time-to-polarity cycle time ratio of at least 0.7, where for each of said respective negative and positive portions of the waveform the peak current time is the duration of time above 95% of the peak current level for said positive and negative portions, respectively, and said polarity cycle time is the duration of time of each of said positive and negative portions, respectively.
12. The power source of claim 11, wherein the peak current time-to-polarity cycle time ratio is in the range of 0.7 and 0.9, and preferably wherein the peak current time-to-polarity cycle time ratio is in the range of 0.75 and 0.88.
13. The power source of one of the claims 1 to 12, wherein the frequency is in the range of 1 to 2 KHz.
14. A TIG welding power source (100), in particular according to one of the claims 5 to 8, comprising:
a power conversion circuit (110) configured to convert an input current to an output current;
a main bridge circuit (160) operatively connected to the power conversion circuit (110) and configured to switch a direction of the output current through a welding output circuit path operatively connected to a welding output of the welding power source (100) at the command of a controller (130) of the welding power source (100); and
an auxiliary bridge circuit (170) operatively connected to the main bridge circuit (160) and configured to introduce a high impedance path between the power conversion circuit (110) and the welding output circuit path at the command of the controller (130) of the welding power source (100),
wherein a welding output current of the welding power supply (100) is an AC output current having a plurality of positive portions and negative portions and wherein said welding output current has a frequency in the range of 500 to 999 Hz, and a waveform average current output of at least 100 amps,
wherein each of said positive and negative portions of said waveform have a peak current time-to-polarity cycle time ratio in the range of 0.85 to 0.998, where for each of said respective negative and positive portions of the waveform the peak current time is the duration of time above 95% of the peak current level for said positive and negative portions, respectively, and said polarity cycle time is the duration of time of each of said positive and negative portions, respectively.
15. A TIG welding power source (100), in particular according to one of the claims 1 to 4, comprising:
a power conversion circuit (110) configured to convert an input current to an output current;

a main bridge circuit (160) operatively connected to the power conversion circuit (110) and configured to switch a direction of the output current through a welding output circuit path operatively connected to a welding output of the welding power source (100) at the command of a controller (130) of the welding power source (100); and

5 an auxiliary bridge circuit (170) operatively connected to the main bridge circuit (160) and configured to introduce a high impedance path between the power conversion circuit and the welding output circuit path at the command of the controller (130) of the welding power source (100),

10 wherein a welding output current of the welding power supply is an AC output current having a plurality of positive portions and negative portions and wherein said welding output current has a frequency of at least 1 KHz, and a waveform average current output of at least 100 amps, and

15 wherein each of said positive and negative portions of said waveform have a peak current time-to-polarity cycle time ratio of at least 0.7, where for each of said respective negative and positive portions of the waveform the peak current time is the duration of time above 95% of the peak current level for said positive and negative portions, respectively, and said polarity cycle time is the duration of time of each of said positive and negative portions, respectively.

FIG. 1

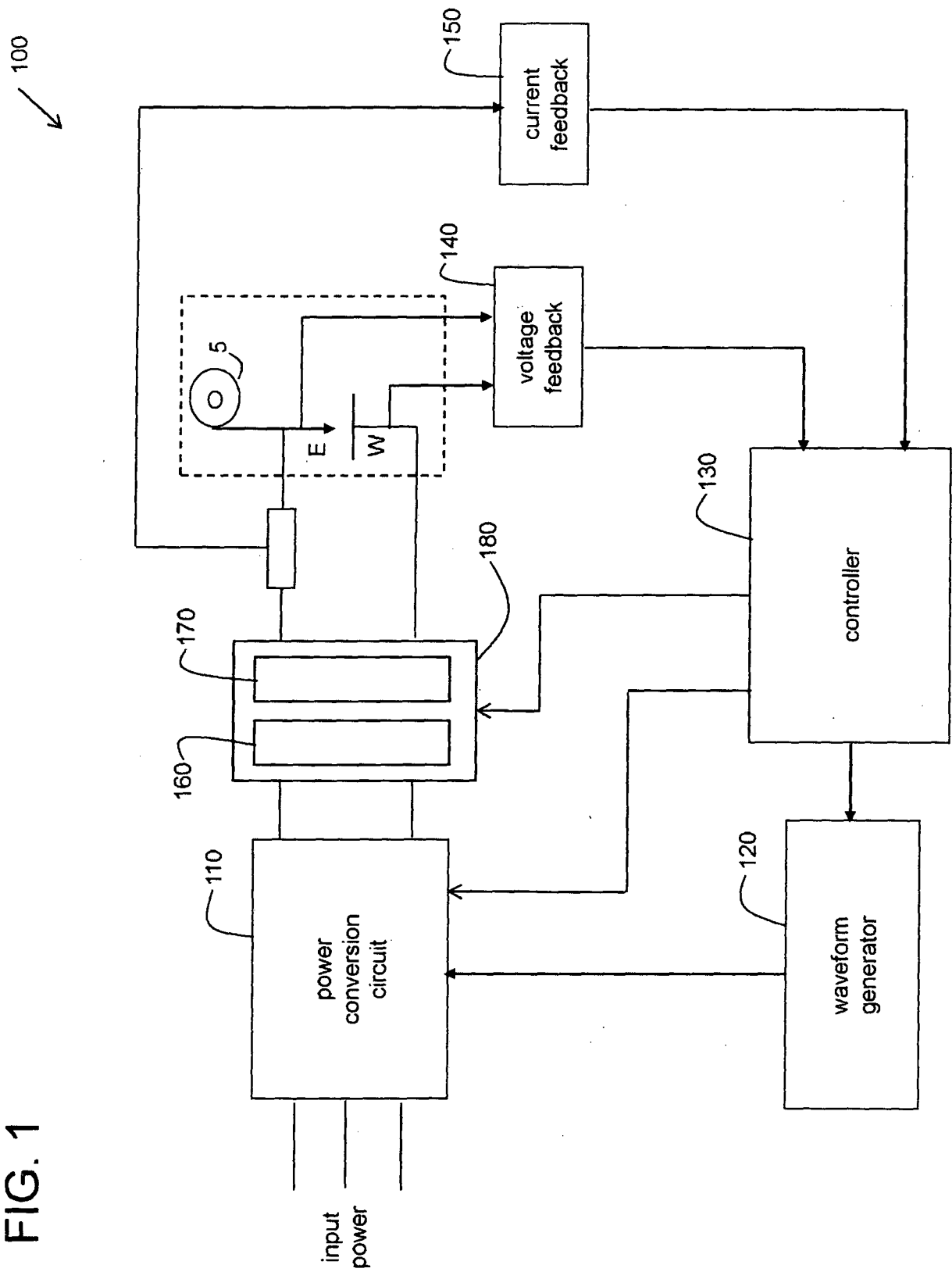


FIG. 2

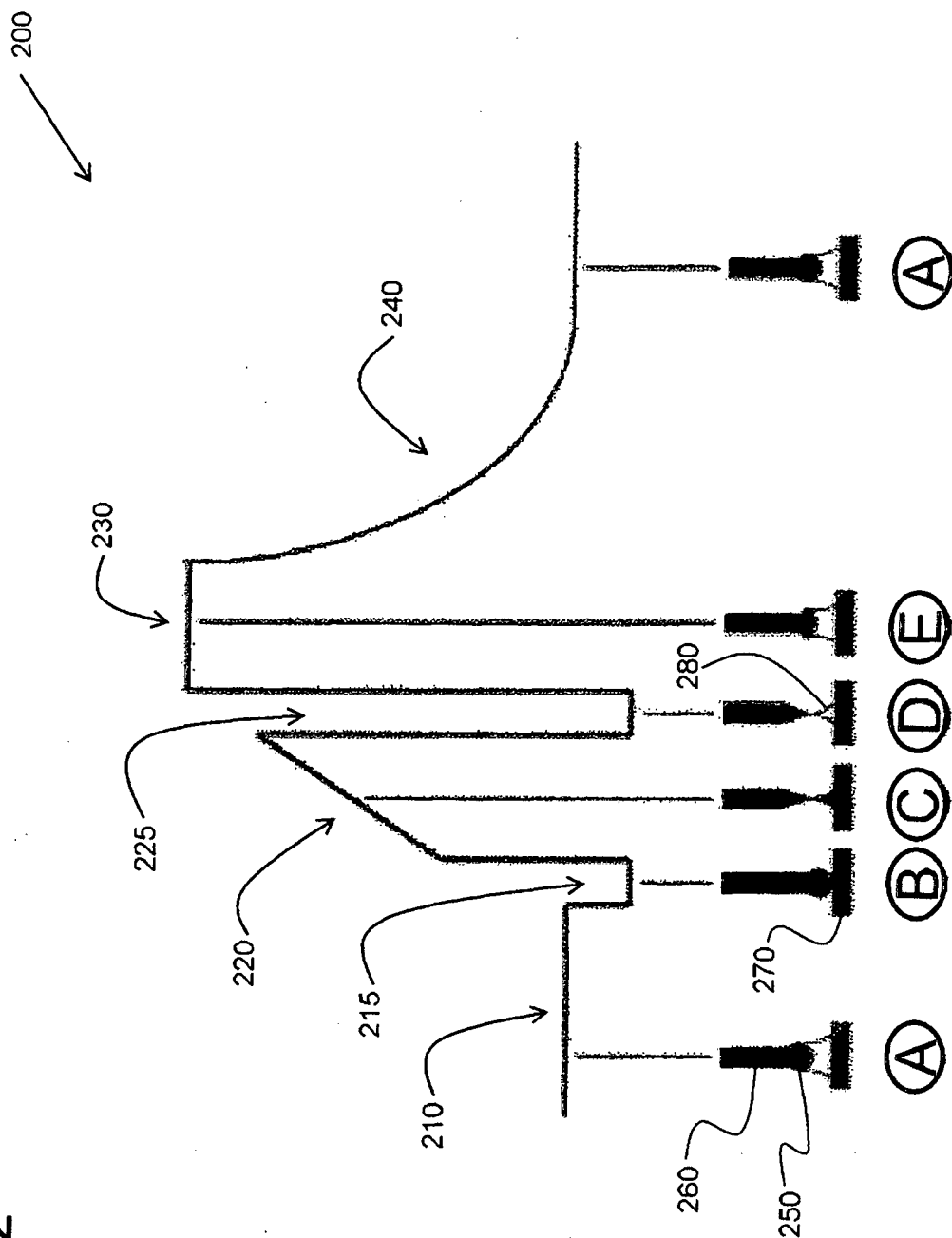


FIG. 3

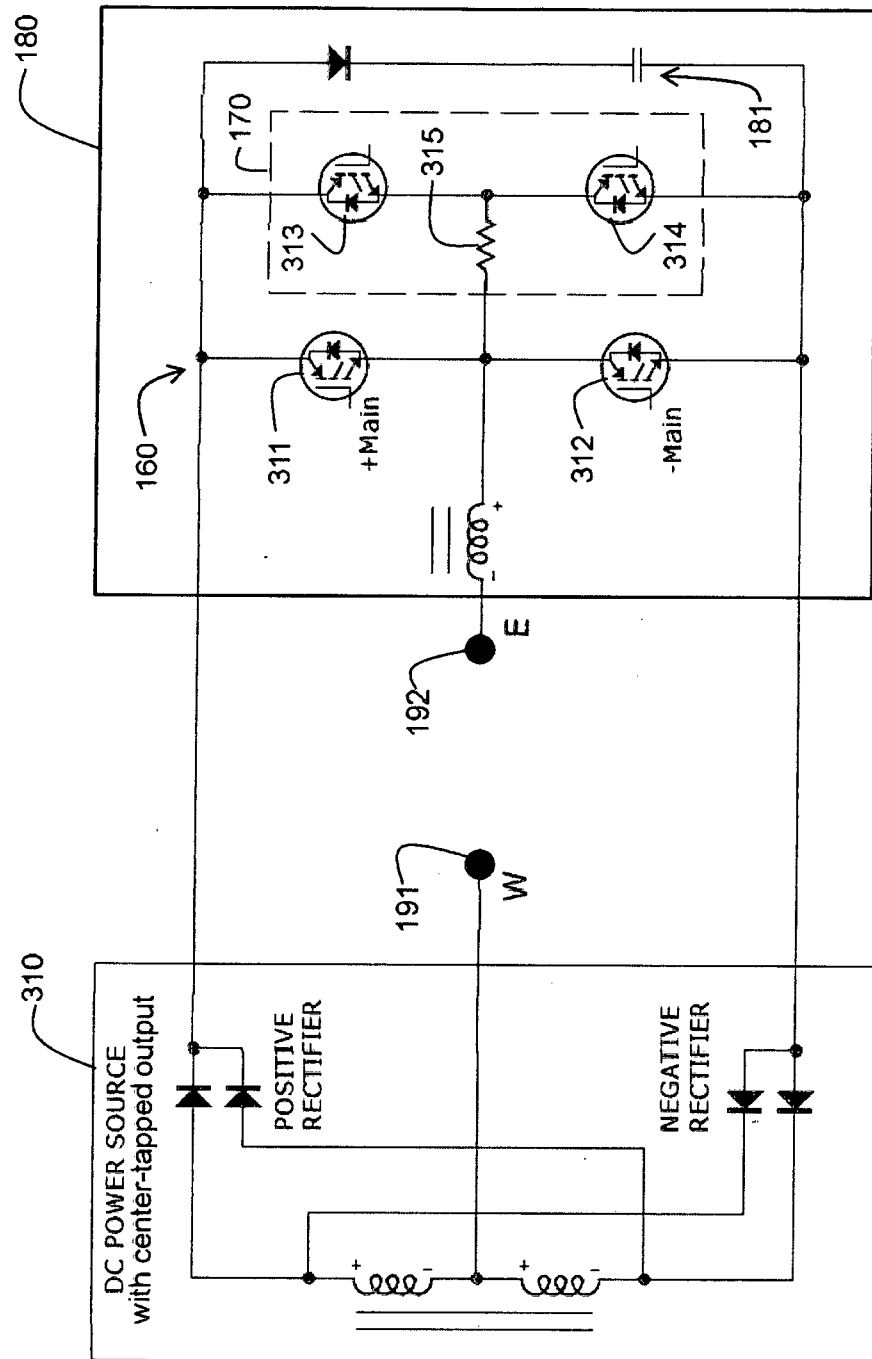


FIG. 4A

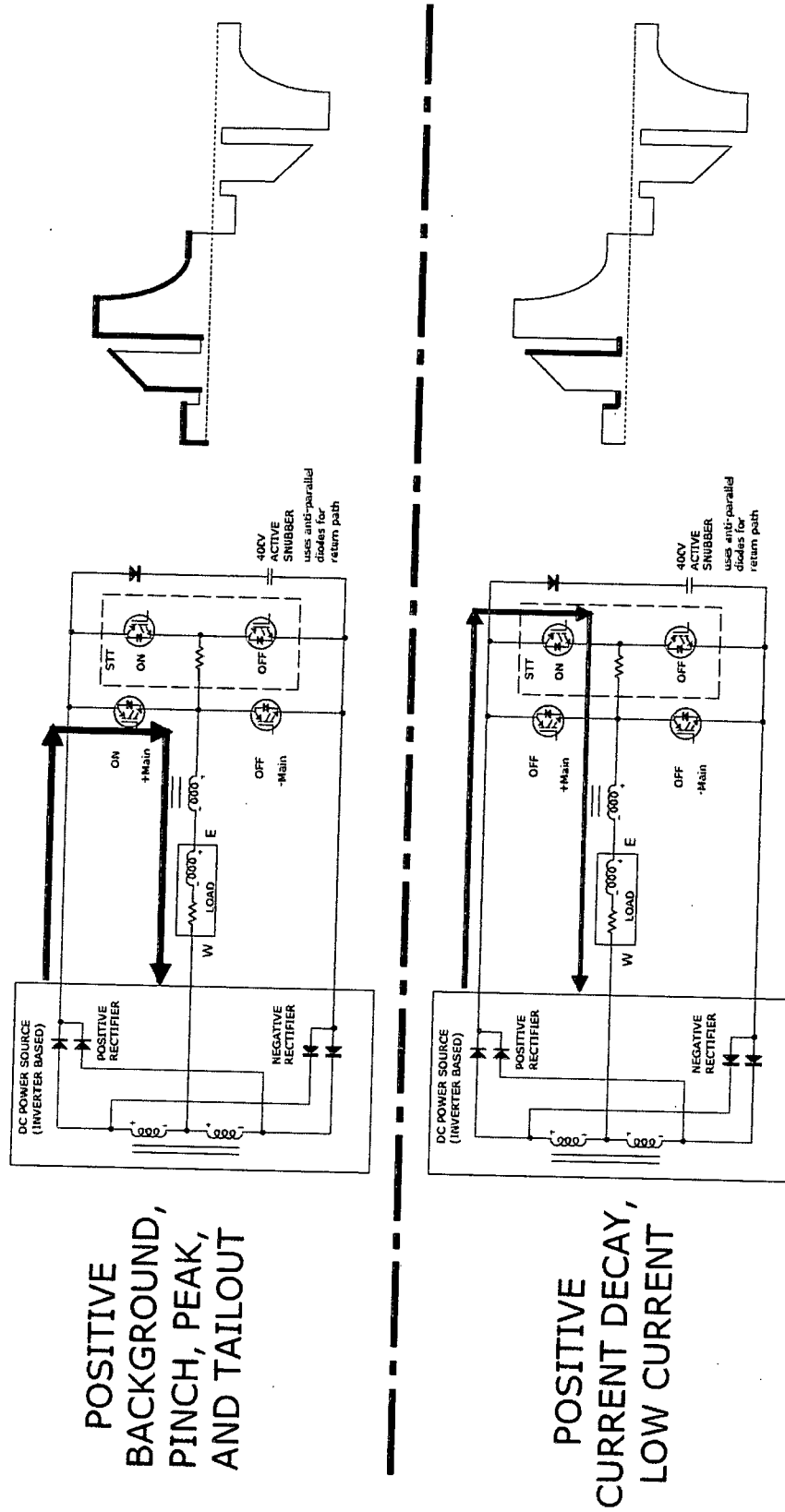


FIG. 4B

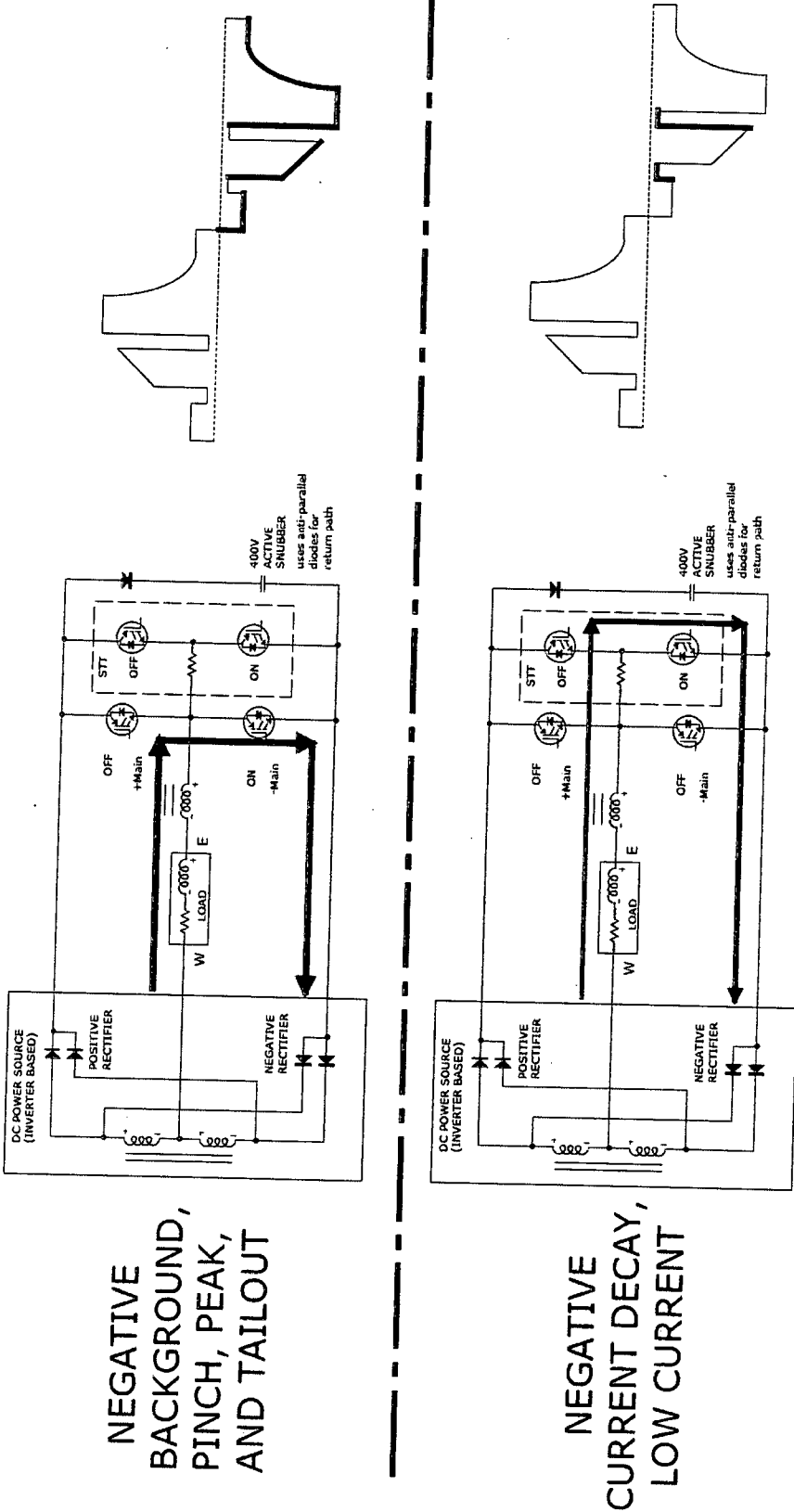


FIG. 5

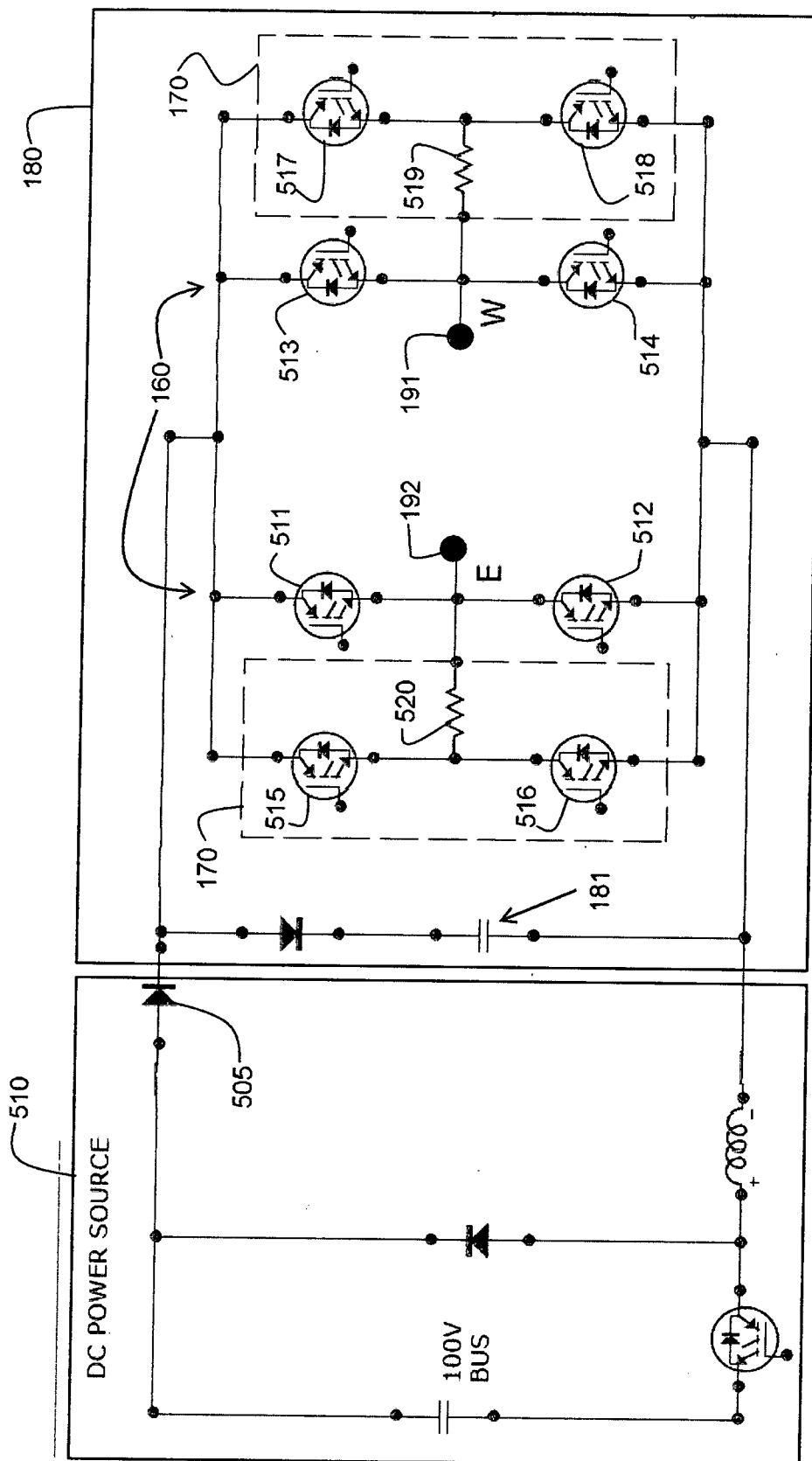


FIG. 6A

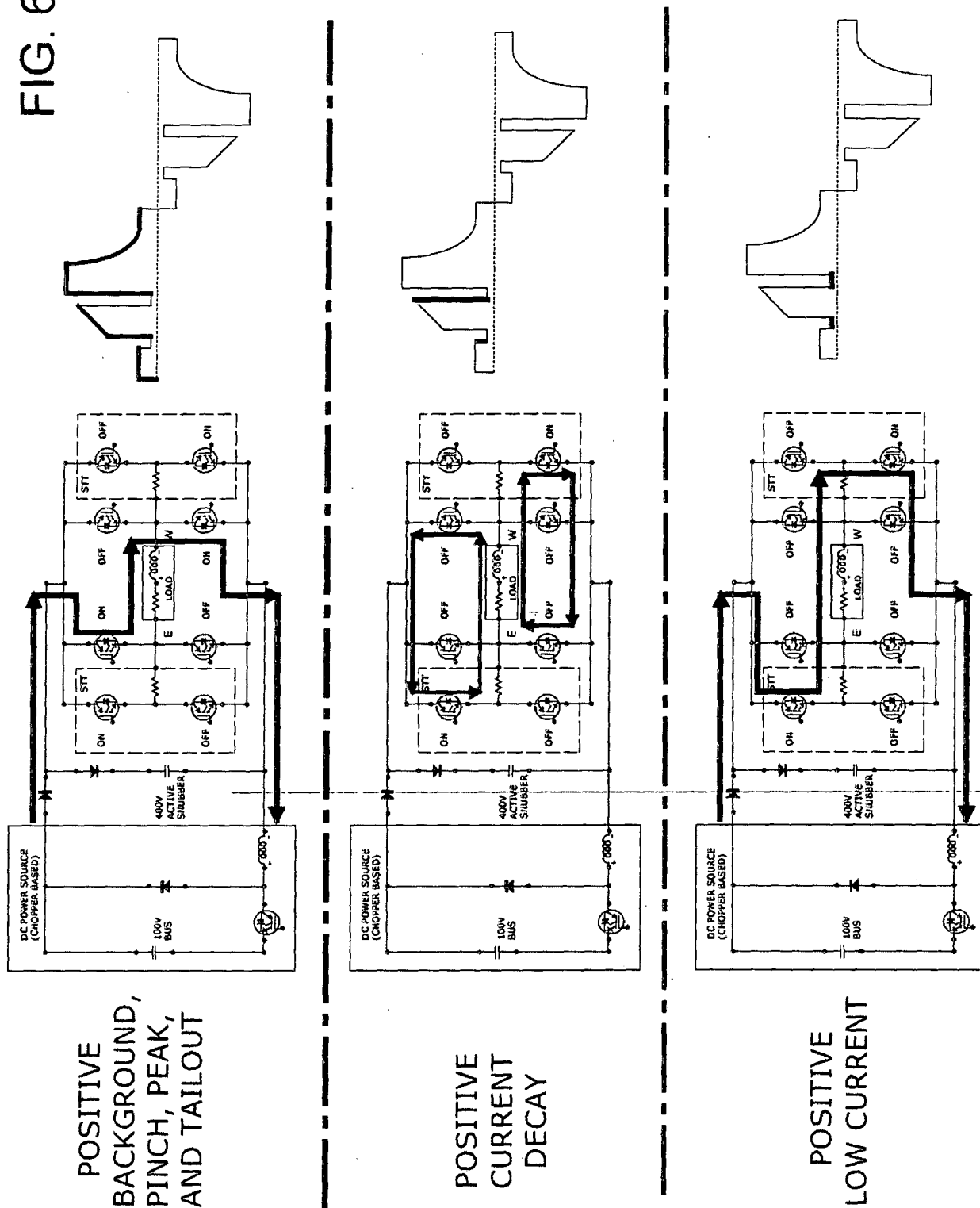


FIG. 6B

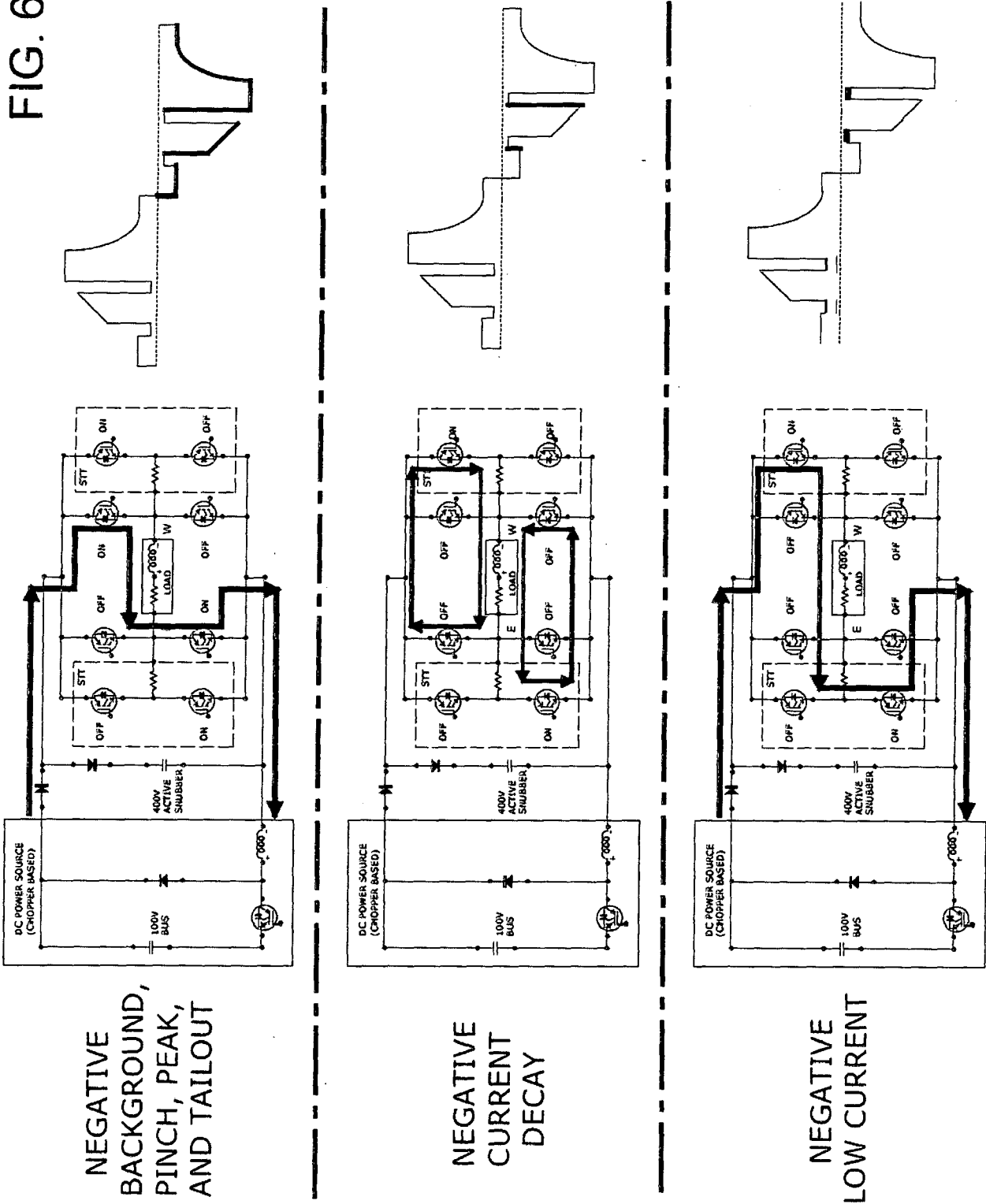


FIG. 7

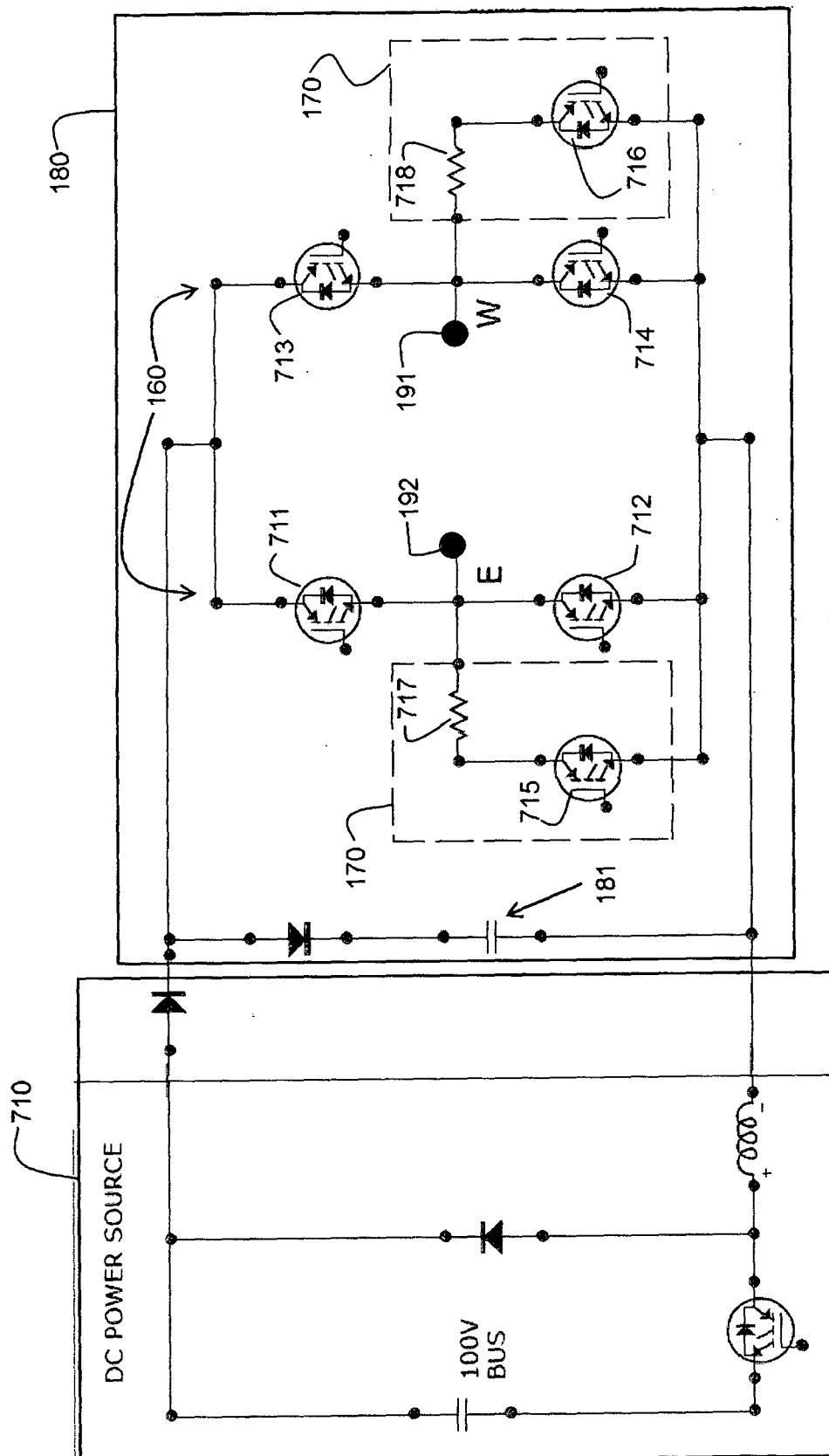
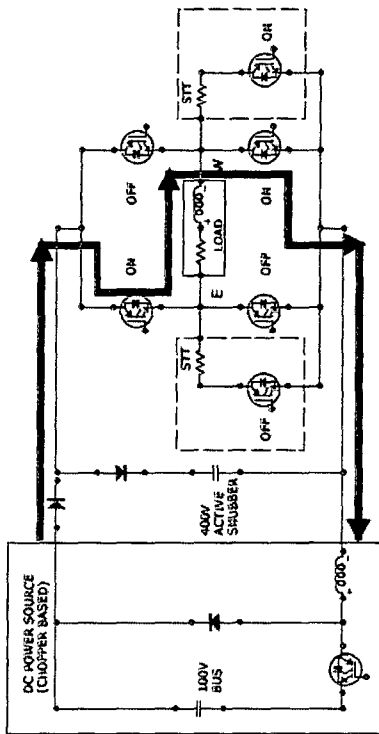
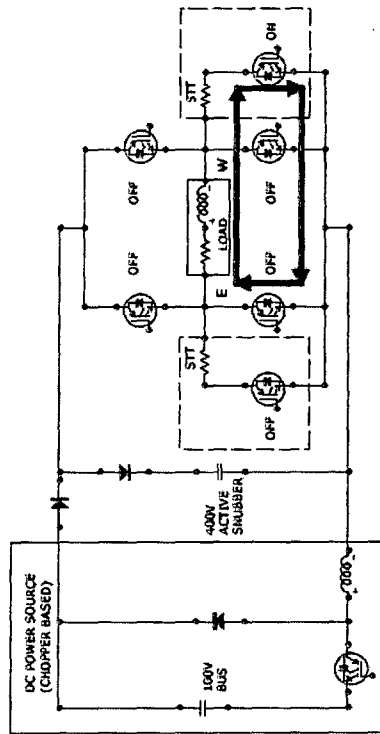


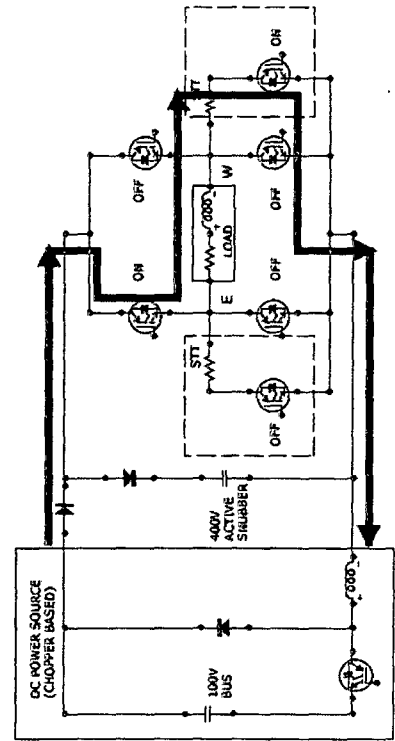
FIG. 8A



POSITIVE
BACKGROUND,
PINCH, PEAK,
AND TAILOUT



POSITIVE
CURRENT
DECAY



POSITIVE
LOW CURRENT

FIG. 8B

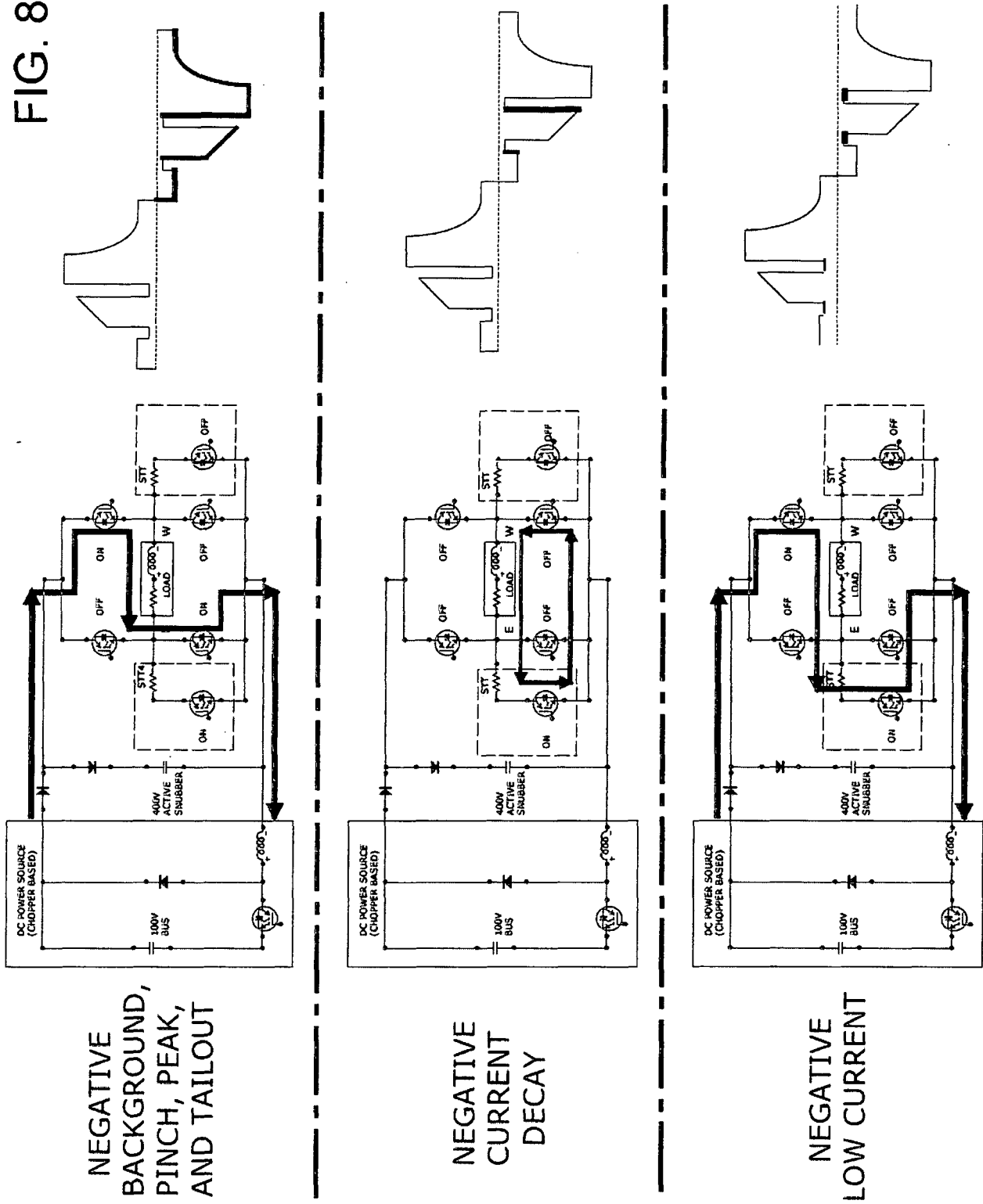


FIG. 9

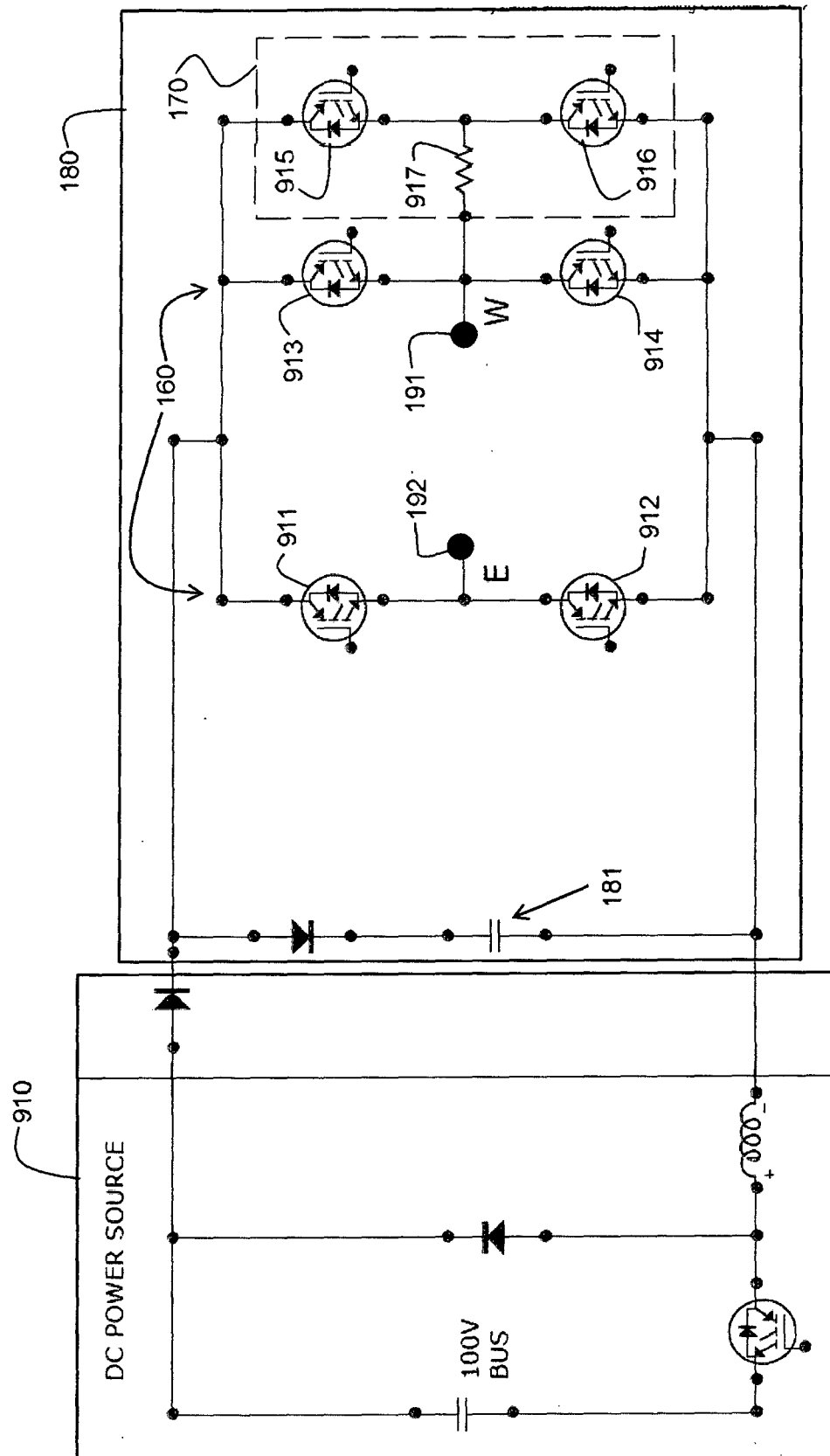


FIG. 10A

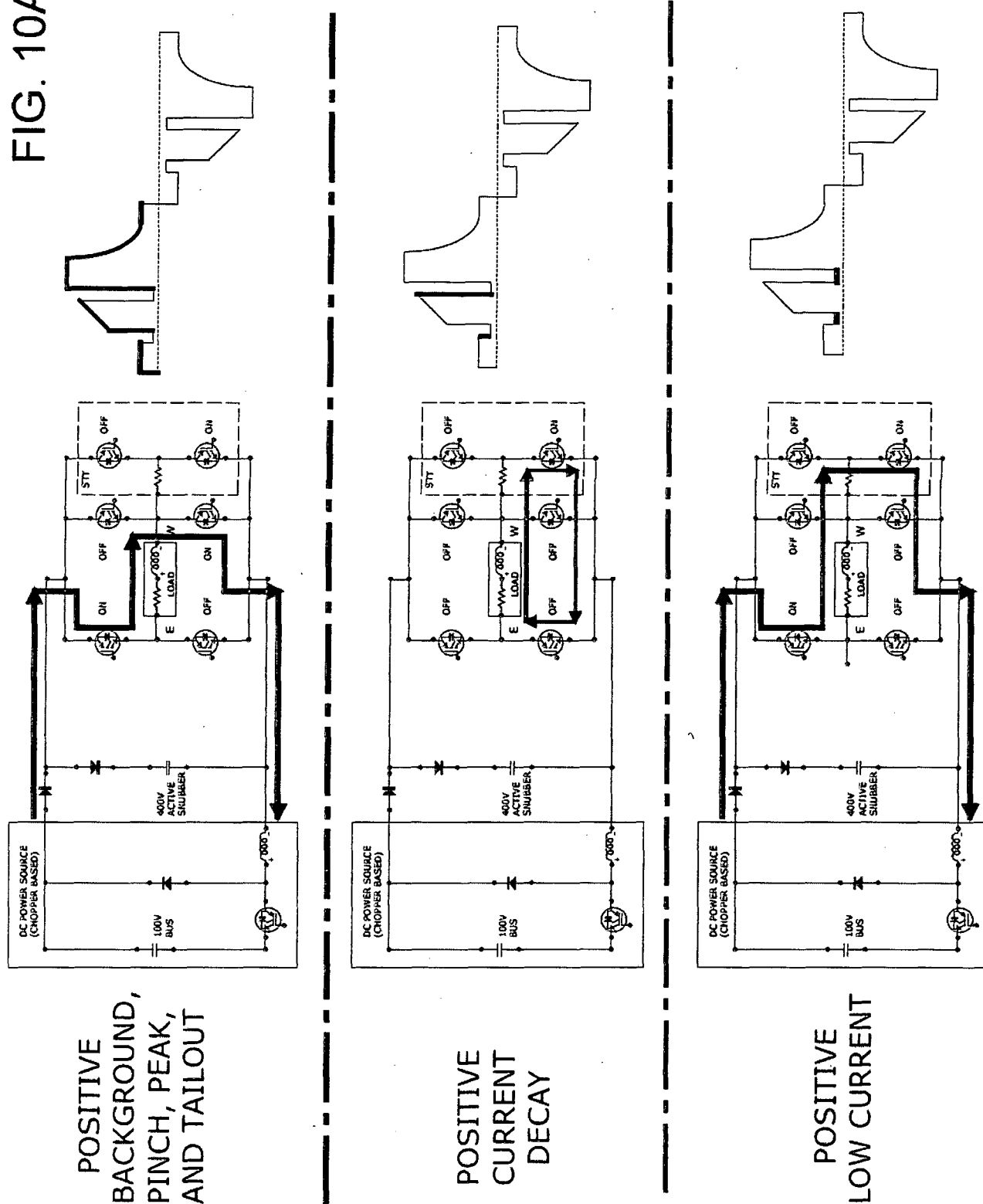
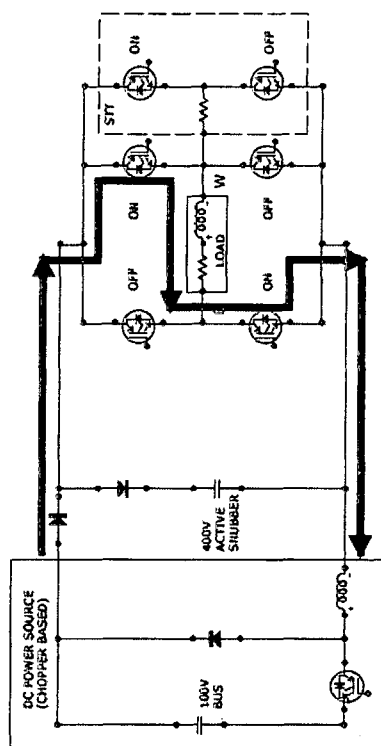
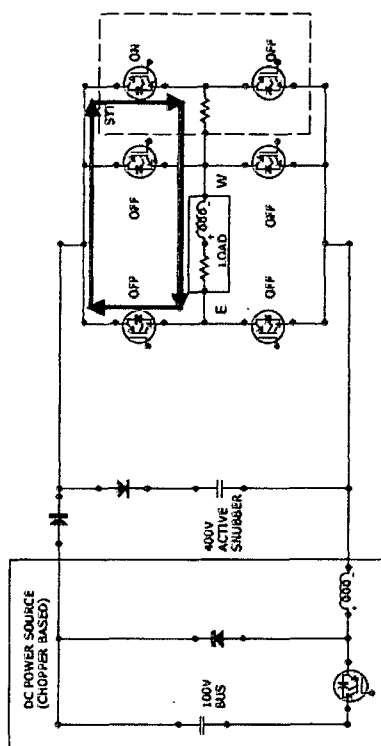
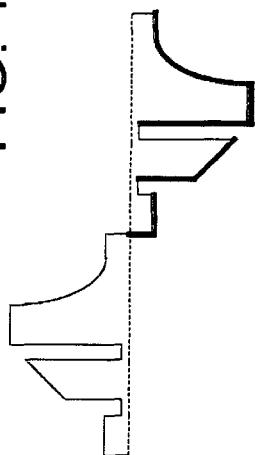


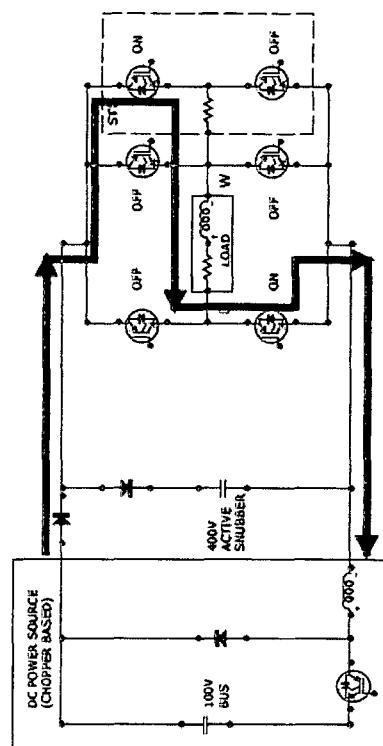
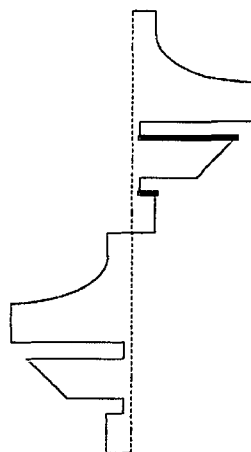
FIG. 10B



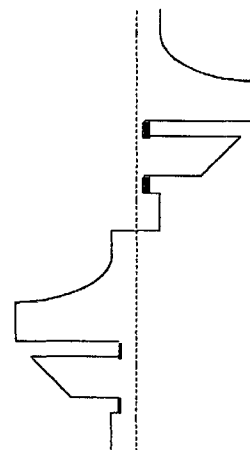
NEGATIVE
BACKGROUND,
PINCH, PEAK,
AND TAILOUT



NEGATIVE
CURRENT
DECAY



NEGATIVE
LOW CURRENT



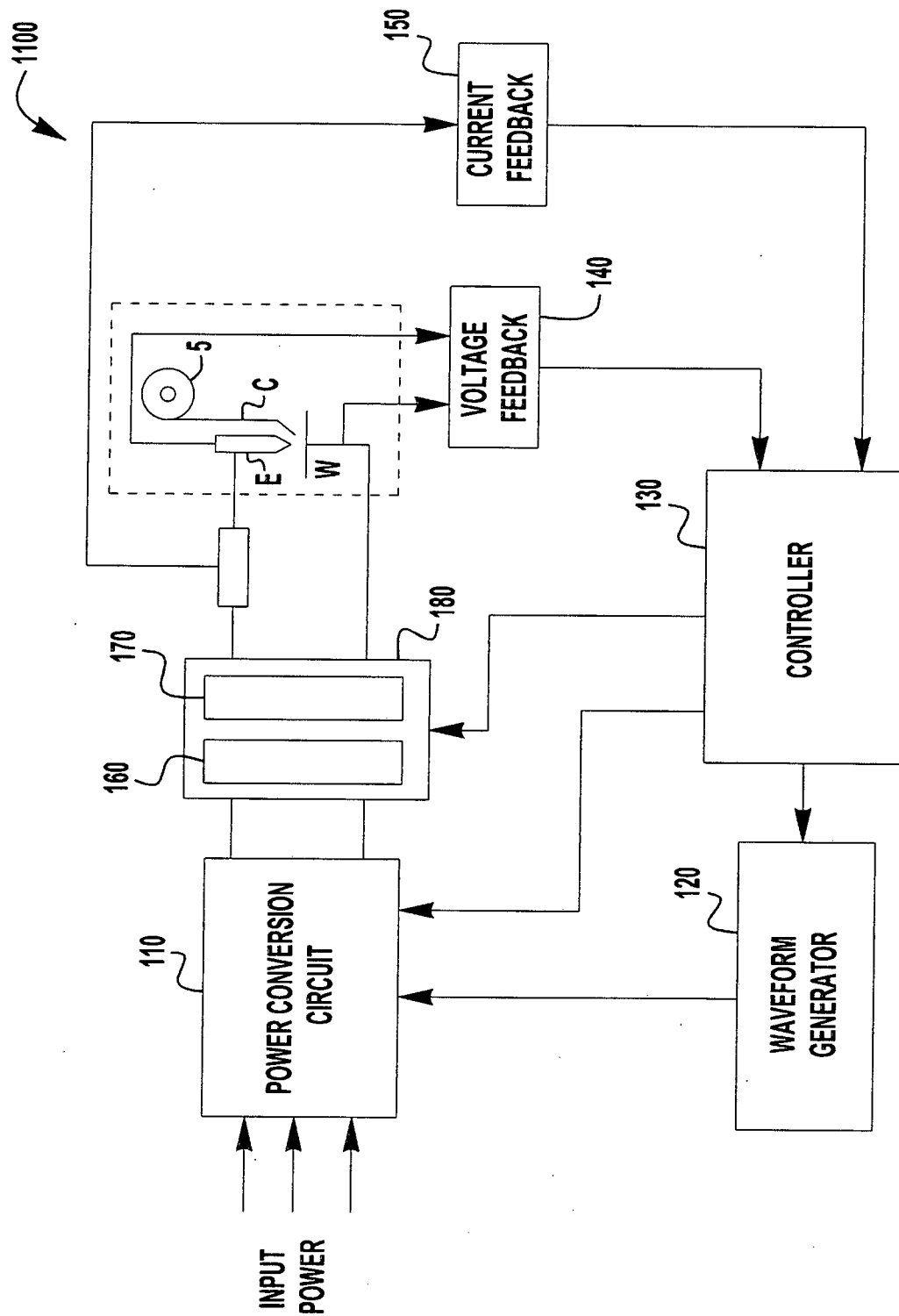


FIG. 11

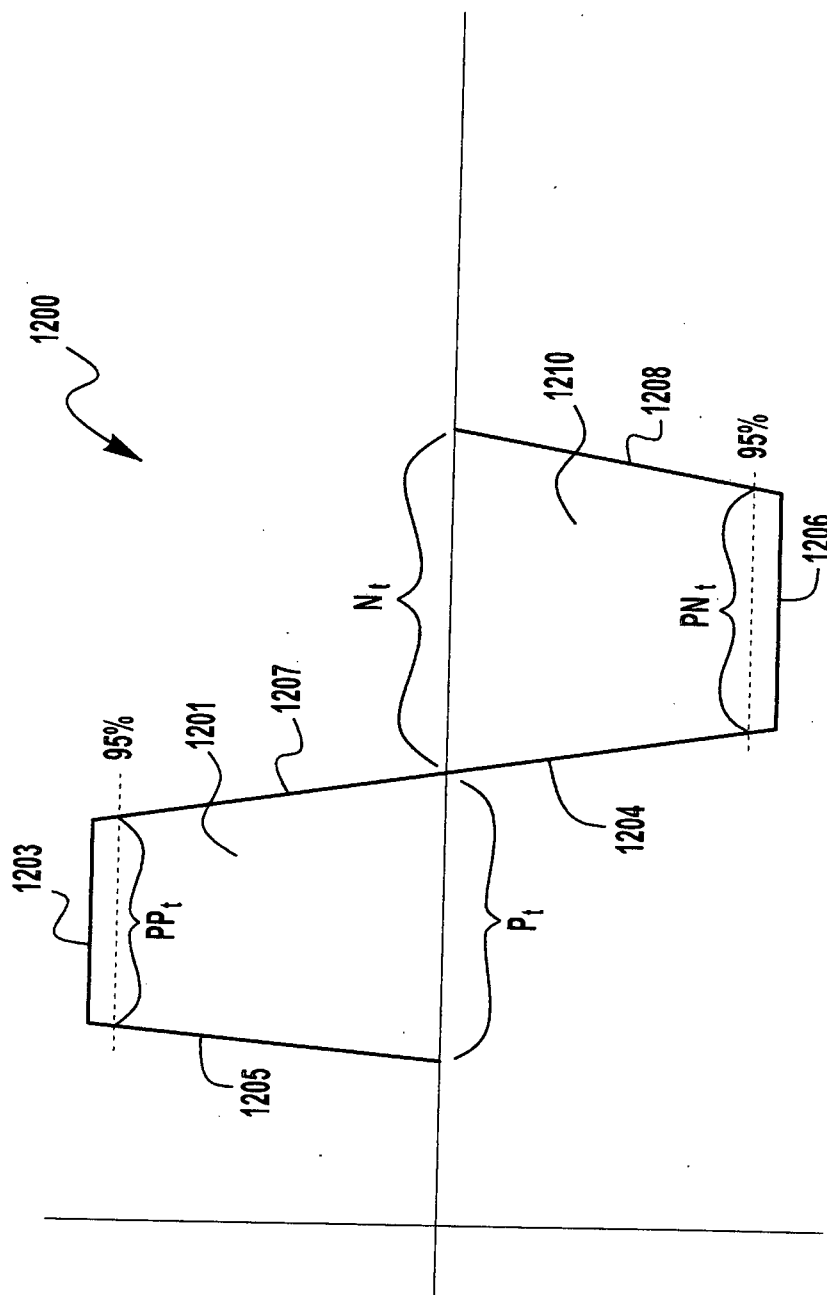


FIG. 12