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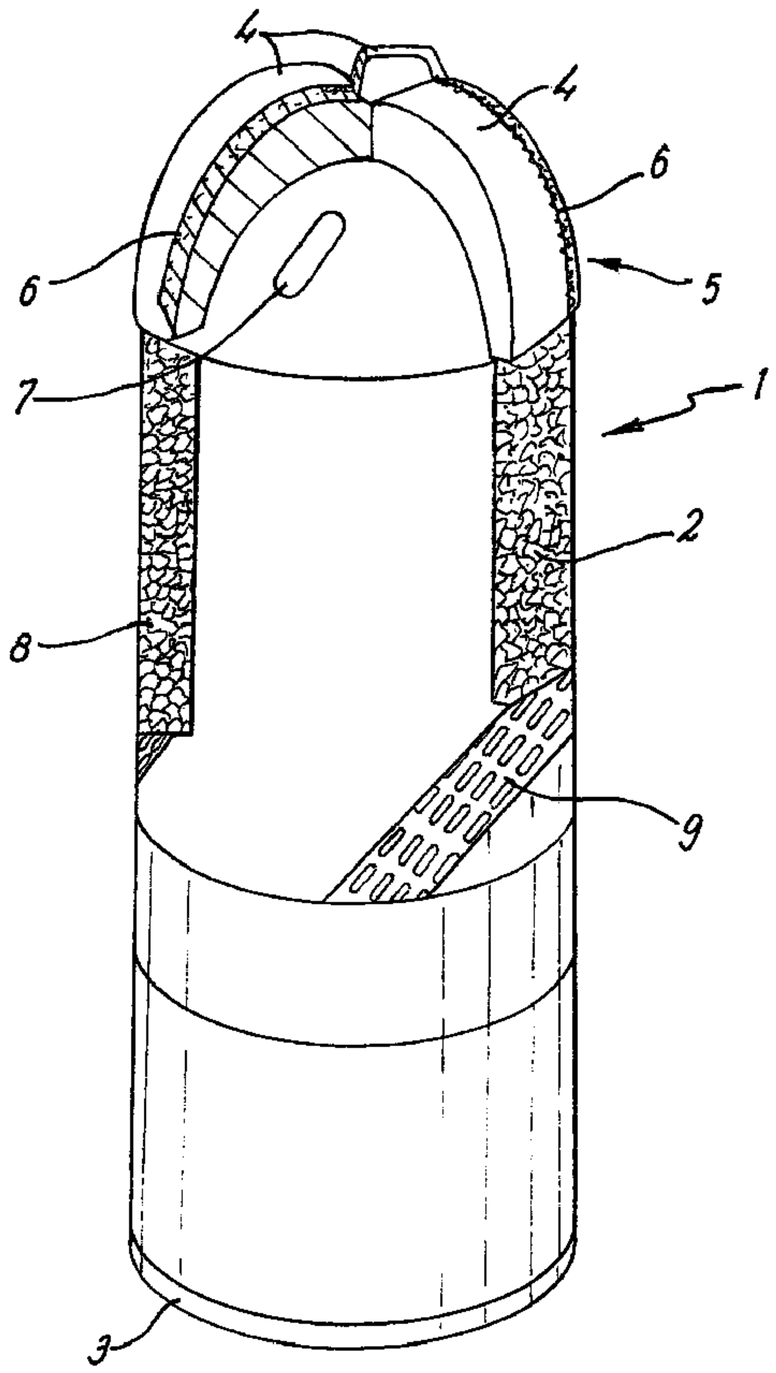
(54) Titre : TREPAN DESTINE AU FORAGE PENDANT LA DESCENTE DU TUBAGE
(54) Title: DRILLING BIT FOR DRILLING WHILE RUNNING CASING



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:
A drill bit for drilling casing in a well bore. The drill bit is constructed from a combination of relatively soft and relatively hard materials. The proportions of the materials are selected such that the drill bit provides suitable cutting and boring of the well bore while being able to be drilled through by a subsequent drill bit. Methods of applying hard materials to a soft material body are provided.

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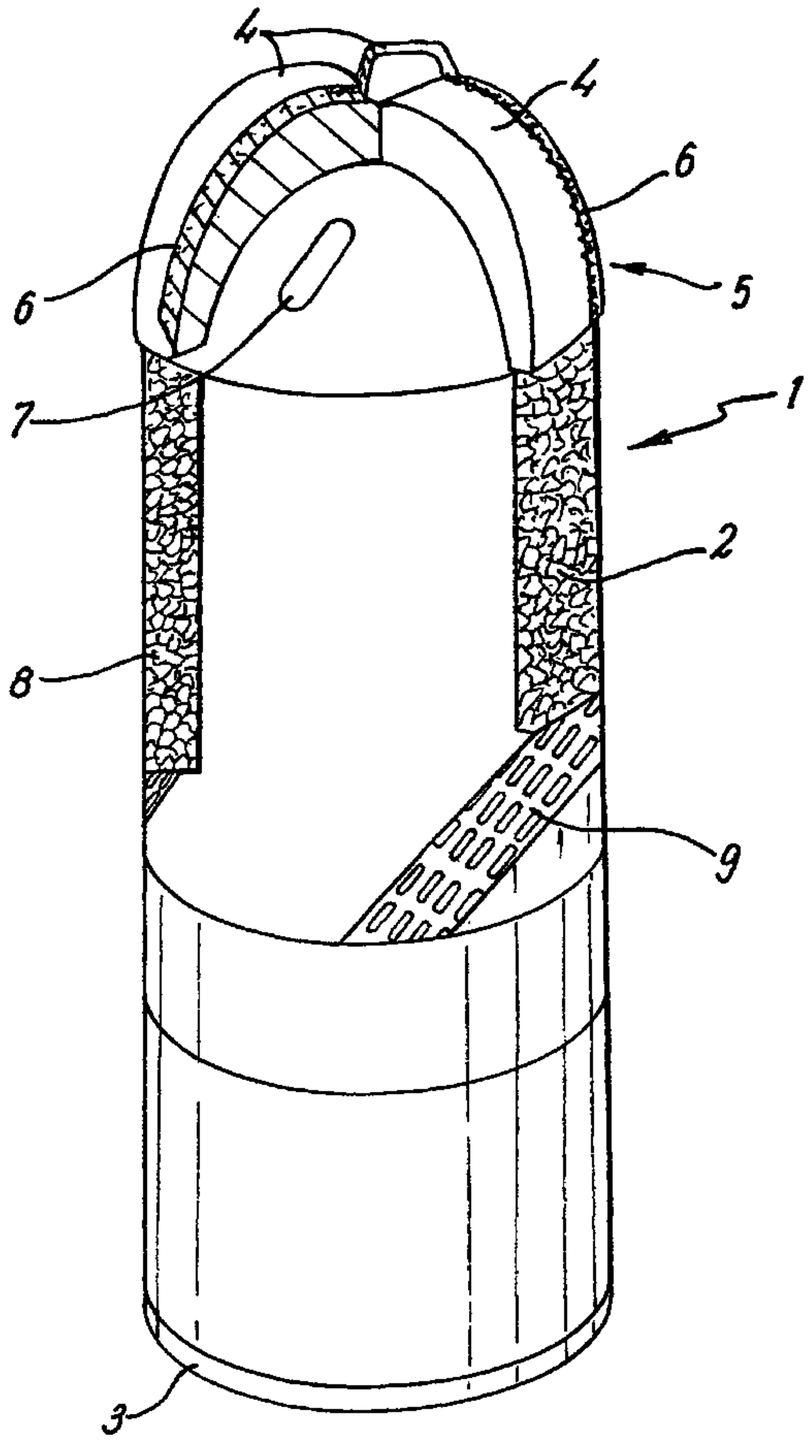

(57) Abstract: A drill bit for drilling casing in a well bore. The drill bit is constructed from a combination of relatively soft and relatively hard materials. The proportions of the materials are selected such that the drill bit provides suitable cutting and boring of the well bore while being able to be drilled through by a subsequent drill bit. Methods of applying hard materials to a soft material body are provided.

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DRILLING BIT FOR DRILLING WHILE RUNNING CASING

The present invention relates to drilling tools as are typically used for drilling well bores.

Conventionally, when drilling a well bore of the type used in oil or gas production, a string of drill pipe having a drill bit on the lower end thereof is advanced into the ground. As the drill is advanced into the ground it encounters different rock formations, some of which may be unstable. To minimise problems which may be incurred by running the drill bit from one formation to another, it is common practice to run the drill bit to a predetermined depth, and then remove or "trip" the drill string from the bore. Structural casing, typically made of heavy steel piping, is then lowered into the bore and cemented in place when set. The casing acts as a lining within the bore, and prevents collapse of the newly drilled bore or contamination of the oil or gas reservoir.

As a consequences of having to carry out the above procedure, the cost and time taken to drill a bore is

increased as it is necessary to perform a number of trips down the well. It will be appreciated that at the considerable depths reached during oil and gas production the time taken to implement complex retrieval procedures to recover the drill string can be very long, and accordingly the beginning of profitable production can be greatly delayed.

An attempt has been made to mitigate this problem with the introduction of a procedure known as "drilling with casing". This procedure relies on the attachment of a drill bit to the actual casing string, so that the drill bit functions not only to drill the earth formation, but also to guide the casing into the well bore. This is advantageous as the casing is pulled into the bore by the drill bit, and therefore negates the requirement of having to retrieve the drill string and drill bit after reaching a target depth to allow cementing.

While this procedure greatly increases the efficiency of the drilling procedure, a further problem is encountered when the casing is cemented upon reaching the desired depth. The advantage of drilling with casing is that the drill bit does not have to be retrieved from the well bore. However as a result, should drilling to a greater depth be required after cementing the casing, the subsequent drill bit has to pass through the previous bit in order to advance. This is extremely difficult as drill bits are required to remove hard rock material and are accordingly very resistant and robust structures typically manufactured from materials such as Tungsten Carbide or steel. Attempting to drill through an old drill bit may result in

damaging the new drill bit, adversely affecting the efficiency of any further drilling. Consequently, the damaged drill bit would have to be retrieved from the bore and replaced, and the time and cost advantage gained by using the drilling with casing procedure would be lost.

It would therefore be a distinct advantage to provide a drill bit for use during drilling with casing which can drill rock and earth formations but which can also be drilled through by another drill bit. The provision of a drill bit which allows the passage of a subsequent drill bit through it, would reduce the number of trips into a well bore required during a normal drilling procedure and minimise the risk of damaging any further drill bits introduced into the bore.

In our prior Patent Application PCT/GB99/01816 we have suggested that the drill bit has hard drilling material that may be moved away from the remaining body of the drill shoe prior to subsequent drilling through of the drill bit. We have also proposed EP0815342, a drill bit or shoe having hard drilling material placed only on the drill shoe or bit at the peripheral circumference thereof, and specifically only at the sides of the drill bit or shoe where the diameter is greater than the internal diameter of the casing. The present invention is distinguished from both of these teachings in that it provides for a drill shoe or bit that has hard material within the area below the internal boundaries of the casing, and does not require moving parts to be displaced before subsequent drilling through can be commenced.

It is an object of the present invention to provide a drill bit for use in a well bore which can drill earth and rock formations and guide a casing string into a well bore simultaneously.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a drill bit for use in a well bore which is constructed from a material which allows a second drill bit to drill through it.

It is a yet further object of the present invention to provide a drill bit for use in a well bore which allows a second drill bit to drill through it, such that the second drill bit is not damaged and can progress beyond the point reached by the original drill bit within the well bore.

According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided a drill bit for drilling with casing in a well bore, said drill bit being constructed from a combination of a relatively soft material and a relatively hard material, wherein the hard material is suitable for cutting earth or rock, and wherein the combination of materials is in such proportion and in such arrangement to allow a subsequent further drill bit to drill through it.

Preferably the drill bit is substantially constructed from the relatively soft material, wherein the relatively soft material is adapted to be drilled through with a standard earth drill bit.

Preferably the drill bit is formed with a body having or being associated with a nose portion upon which are cutting members, wherein the body is made substantially from the relatively soft material and at least the leading edge or cutting surface of each cutting member is made from the hard material.

Preferably the hard wearing material is a hard material such as tungsten carbide or a superhard material such as diamond composite or cubic boron nitride although any other suitable material may be used.

Preferably the soft, drillable material is aluminium. Alternatively the soft drillable material is copper or brass alloy, although any other suitable material could be used.

There may be a plurality of soft materials and there may be a plurality of hard materials.

In one possible embodiment the nose is directly coated with the hard wearing material.

Optionally the coating is a continuous layer or film that covers the surface of the nose.

Alternatively the coating is non-continuous, such that the nose is afforded areas which are not coated by the hard wearing material, wherein upon rotation of the drill bit the cumulative effect of the coated areas gives complete circumferential coverage of the dimensions of the drilled hole.

Alternatively the coating may be applied to an intermediate which is amenable to the nose of the drill bit.

Preferably the intermediate is nickel.

The intermediate may be attached to the nose prior to coating with the hard wearing material. Optionally the intermediate may be coated with the hard wearing material prior to attachment to the nose.

In a second embodiment the hard wearing material is applied to the nose in the form of preformed elements wherein the cumulative effect of said preformed elements is to cover the surface of the nose and so act as a coating thereof.

The preformed elements may be chips or fragments of the hard material.

The preformed elements of the hard material may be directly applied to the nose.

Alternatively the preformed elements of hard material are applied to the nose following the application of an amenable intermediate material to the nose or the preformed elements.

Preferably the amenable intermediate material is nickel substrate.

The preformed elements may be attached to the nose by standard techniques such as brazing, welding or shrink fitting.

Optionally the preformed elements have a re-enforced structure to aid drilling of hard formations. Where the preformed elements have a re-enforced structure, preferably the preformed elements are pre-weakened prior to attachment to the nose in order to allow fracture of the preformed elements upon drilling.

Preferably the drill bit may also comprise a plurality of flow ports to allow fluid bypass and lubrication of the bit.

Preferably the drill bit also comprises a stabiliser or centraliser.

Preferably the drill bit also comprises reaming members.

According to a third aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of fixing a hard or super hard wearing material to a drill bit nose made of a soft drillable material, wherein a jet is used to blow gases at very high speeds towards a cast of the nose and particles of the hard or superhard wearing material are introduced into the gas stream, wherein the kinetic energy of the procedure is converted to thermal energy which welds the particles to the nose.

According to a fourth aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for fixing a hard or superhard wearing

material to a drill bit nose made of a soft drillable material, wherein particles of the hard or superhard wearing material are placed within a mould and thereafter the soft drillable material is poured in molten form into the mould, such that on cooling said hard or superhard wearing particles are set in situ.

Alternatively the hard wearing material can be fixed to the nose by a standard technique such as brazing, welding and electroplating.

In another aspect, the invention provides a drill bit for drilling with casing in a well bore, the drill bit being constructed from a combination of a relatively soft material and a relatively hard material, wherein the hard material is suitable for cutting earth and rock, wherein the combination of materials is in such a proportion and in such arrangement to allow a subsequent further drill bit, suitable for cutting earth and rock, to drill through the drill bit, and wherein the drill bit comprises a nose of relatively soft material, and cutters of relatively hard material attached to the nose, wherein the nose is constructed from aluminium, copper, or brass alloy, and a bonding material is provided intermediate the nose and the cutters that is different to, but amenable to, the material of the nose.

According to an aspect of the present invention there is provided a drill bit for drilling with casing in a wellbore, comprising:

a nose; and

cutting members disposed on the nose and made from a combination of a relatively soft base material, a relatively soft intermediate material, and a relatively hard material, wherein:

the hard material is suitable for cutting earth or rock;

the combination of materials is in such proportion and in such arrangement to allow a standard earth drill bit to drill through said drill bit without substantially damaging said standard earth bit;

the cutting members are substantially made from the base material;

the intermediate material is amenable to the base material and disposed between the hard material and the base material;

the hard material is applied to the cutting members as preformed elements;

the cumulative effect of said preformed elements is to cover the surface of the cutting members, thereby acting as a coating thereof; and

the preformed elements are chips or fragments of the hard material.

According to another aspect of the present invention there is provided a drill bit for drilling with casing in a wellbore comprising:

a nose;

cutting members disposed on the nose, and being made from a combination of a relatively soft base material and a relatively soft bonding material, the cutting members

having preformed elements made from a relatively hard material; wherein

the hard material is suitable for cutting earth or rock;

the cutting members are made substantially from the base material; and

the bonding material is disposed on at least a leading edge or cutting surface of each cutting member between the hard material and the base material so that, when the nose is drilled through by a standard earth bit, the bonding material will not substantially impede separation of the preformed elements, thereby allowing the standard earth bit to drill through the drill bit without substantially damaging the standard earth bit.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a drill bit for drilling with casing in a wellbore, comprising:

a nose; and

cutting members disposed on the nose and made from a combination of a relatively soft base material, a relatively soft intermediate material, and a relatively hard material, wherein:

the hard material is suitable for cutting earth or rock;

the combination of materials is in such proportion and in such arrangement to allow a standard earth drill bit to drill through said drill bit without substantially damaging said standard earth bit;

the cutting members are substantially made from the base material, and

the intermediate material is amenable to the base material and disposed between the hard material and the base material;

the hard material is applied to the cutting members as preformed elements,

the cumulative effect of said preformed elements is to cover the surface of the cutting members, thereby acting as a coating thereof, and

the preformed elements have a reinforced structure to aid drilling of hard formations.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for casing-while-drilling a well bore through earth and rock, comprising:

attaching a first drill bit to a string of casing, the first drill bit being constructed from a combination of a relatively soft material and a superhard material that is suitable for cutting the earth and rock, the combination of materials being in such proportion and in such arrangement to allow a subsequent second drill bit, suitable for cutting the earth and rock, to drill through the first drill bit, and the first drill bit comprising a nose of the relatively soft material, with the superhard material attached thereto;

drilling the well bore through the earth and rock with the first drill bit on the casing; and

subsequently running the second drill bit inside the casing within the well bore and drilling through the first drill bit with the second drill bit;

characterised in that:

a) the soft material is aluminium, copper or brass alloy;

b) an intermediate material that is different to, but amenable to, the soft material is provided between the nose and the superhard material, and

c) at least some of the superhard material is located within the projection of the internal circumference of the casing on the nose.

In order to provide a better understanding of the invention, example embodiments of the invention will now be illustrated with reference to the following Figures in which;

Figure 1 illustrates a drill bit in accordance with the present invention;

Figure 2 is an elevated view of the top of the drill bit;

Figure 3 illustrates an individual cutting member isolated from the drill bit.

Figure 4 illustrates an elevated view of the top of an alternative embodiment of a drill bit in accordance with the present invention; and

Figure 5 illustrates a pre-formed element for attaching to the nose portion of a drill bit.

Referring firstly to Figure 1, a drill bit generally depicted at 1, is comprised of a cylindrical body 2, that can be mounted on the lower end of a casing string (not shown) via a thread end connection 3 that can mate with the casing. The drill bit 1 is further comprised of a plurality of cutting members 4 which are fixed to the opposite end of the body 2 to the thread end connection 3, namely the nose end 5. The cutting members 4 extend out from the nose end 5.

The nose 5 and cutting members 4 are constructed from a material such as aluminium, copper or brass alloy which is soft enough to allow the aforementioned nose 5 and members 4 to be drilled through by a second and subsequent drill bit (not shown). The cutting members 4 are substantially covered by a relatively hard material 6 typically being a hard material such as tungsten carbide or a superhard material such as diamond composite or cubic boron nitride. In the depicted embodiment the relatively hard material 6 is located at the "leading edge" of the cutting member 4. In this respect the "leading edge" refers to the side of the cutting member 4 which directly contacts the ground or rock upon rotation of the drill bit 1. It is recognised that whilst in the depicted embodiments the hard wearing material is afforded to the leading edge of one or more cutting members 4 on the drill bit 1, the invention is not limited to this configuration. For example the hard wearing material may be applied to the nose 5 in an embodiment having no cutting members 4 or may be applied to the whole surface of the cutting members 4.

The relatively hard material 6 may be applied to the cutting members 4 or nose 5 as a coating, that is as a layer or film. In one embodiment a continuous layer of the material 6 may cover the entire surface of the nose 5, or the cutting members 4. Alternatively a non-continuous layer of the material may coat the nose 5 or cutting members 4. In this instance, the surface of the nose 5 or cutting members 4 will comprise areas that are not coated. However, upon rotation of the drill bit 1, the cumulative effect of the coated areas will be complete circumferential coverage of the inside diameter of the casing in which the drill bit is located.

It is recognised in the present invention that direct application of some coatings to the nose material may not be practical. For example, extremely hard tungsten carbide particles cannot be applied to the preferred nose materials (e.g. aluminium or copper) by lasercarb welding. This material can be applied to soft nickel, however machining said drill bit 1 entirely from nickel would be unduly expensive. Therefore in an alternative embodiment, a coating of the hard material 6 is applied to an intermediate, typically being nickel substrate, which is then attached to the nose 5 of the drill bit 1. Alternatively the nickel substrate can be attached to the nose 5 prior to coating.

In a further embodiment preformed elements of the hard or superhard material 6 are applied to the nose 5 or cutting members 4 of the drill bit 1 in place of a coating of film. Said preformed elements may be chips, or fragments of the hard material 6. Typically the culmative effect of the

preformed elements is to cover the surface of the nose 5 or the cutting members 4 and so act as a coating thereof. The preformed elements may be directly applied to the nose 5 or cutting members 4 or may be applied after applying an amenable material either to the nose 5 or cutting members 4 or the preformed element itself. The amenable material is typically nickel substrate.

The layout of cutting members 4 can be seen more clearly in Figure 2 which shows the nose end 5, viewed from above, and in Figure 3 which shows an individual cutting member 4. It can be seen in Figure 3 that the cutting means 6 has teeth formations 10 which allow any "chips" of material remaining in the well bore to pass through the blade structure.

The nose 5 further comprises flow by areas 7 that allow fluid circulated within the well bore to lubricate the surfaces of the bit 1. The body 2 also comprises a stabiliser or centraliser 9 which maintains the drill bit in the centre of the well bore, and reaming members 8, which function to remove any irregularities or obstructions from the wall of the bore.

In use, the drill bit 1, is run into a well bore (not shown) from the surface, typically whilst being rotated. The drill bit 1 pulls a casing string (not shown) as it is advanced into the newly formed well bore to a predetermined depth. Upon reaching this depth, the casing is cemented to strengthen the lining of the bore. If drilling beyond this first assembly is required, a second drill bit of a smaller diameter to the first is run into the well inside the casing string from the surface.

Upon reaching the first assembly, the new drill bit can drill through the soft drillable material of the original drill bit 1 and cutting members 4, and therefore can proceed to a point beyond the depth reached by the original drill bit 1 within the well bore. The hard or super hard material 6 fixed to the cutting members 4 of the original drill bit 1 disintegrate into shavings when drilled. The shavings released into the well bore when the original bit 1 is drilled through do not obstruct the bore and are therefore not detrimental to the subsequent drilling process. In this manner a further section of the bore can be drilled beyond the previously attained depth without damage to the new drill bit and without needing to retrieve the first assembly from the bore.

When used for drilling through harder formations a thicker section of the preformed element will be required. However it will be appreciated that in such an instance, said preformed elements would not be drillable. Thereby in the event that a thicker element is required, said element is typically pre-weakened prior to attachment to the nose 5 or cutting members 4. In this manner, the elements will have the attributes of high stiffness whilst drilling but low resistance to fracture whilst being drilled. The pre-formed elements can then be applied directly to the nose 5 or cutting members 4 by brazing or shrink-fitting or could be attached to an amenable material, typically nickel substrate.

A first method for fixing the hard or superhard material 6 is now outlined. A jet is used to blow gases at very high

speeds towards a cast or block of the cutting member 4 or nose 5, and which is made from the soft, drillable material. Typically a speed in the region of Mach 2 is used. Very fine particles of the hard or superhard wearing material are introduced into the gas stream. The resulting kinetic energy is converted to thermal energy in the particles, and accordingly the heated particles "weld" to the leading edge of the cast or block therefore forming a thin layer or film.

It will be appreciated that the abovedescribed method could be used with particles of the hard or superhard material, or with intermediates coated by the hard or super hard material or with preformed elements as described above.

An alternative method for fixing preformed hard or superhard particles to the cutting members 4 is to place them within a drill mould. Molten drillable soft material that will eventually become the nose 5 of the drill bit 1 is then poured into the mould. On cooling the metal provides a drill bit 1 that has the hard or superhard particles set in situ.

The present invention is inherent with significant advantages in that the time taken for the drilling operation can be greatly reduced as there is no need to implement complex and timely retrieval operations to recover apparatus from the bore. As a result the profitable stage of production can be begin much sooner.

A further advantage, is that unlike the drill bits known to the art, the drill bit of the present invention is

drillable by another drill bit and the risk of damage to the second drill bit is therefore reduced. Furthermore as the cutting means of the cutting members consist of fine layers or cutting elements formed from hard material, they disintegrate into shavings upon drilling and therefore do not act as an obstruction to any subsequent apparatus that is advanced into the well.

Further modifications and improvements may be incorporated without departing from the scope of the invention herein intended.

The embodiments of the invention in which an exclusive property or privilege is claimed are defined as follows:

1. A drill bit for drilling with casing in a wellbore, comprising:

a nose; and

cutting members disposed on the nose and made from a combination of a relatively soft base material, a relatively soft intermediate material, and a relatively hard material, wherein:

the hard material is suitable for cutting earth or rock;

the combination of materials is in such proportion and in such arrangement to allow a standard earth drill bit to drill through said drill bit without substantially damaging said standard earth bit;

the cutting members are substantially made from the base material;

the intermediate material is amenable to the base material and disposed between the hard material and the base material;

the hard material is applied to the cutting members as preformed elements;

the cumulative effect of said preformed elements is to cover the surface of the cutting members, thereby acting as a coating thereof; and

the preformed elements are chips or fragments of the hard material.

2. The drill bit of claim 1, wherein the cutting members are disposed proximate to a centre of the nose.

3. The drill bit of claim 1 or 2, wherein the nose further comprises a flow port.

4. The drill bit of claim 1, 2 or 3 wherein the nose is a one piece nose.

5. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 4, further comprising a body, wherein the nose is disposed on the body and the body is made substantially from the relatively soft material.

6. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein the hard material is selected from one of tungsten carbide, diamond composite and cubic boron nitride.

7. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein the base material is selected from one of aluminium, copper and brass alloy.

8. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 5, having a plurality of base materials.

9. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 5, having a plurality of hard materials.

10. The drill bit as claimed in claim 1, wherein the coating is a continuous layer or film.

11. The drill bit as claimed in claim 1, wherein the coating is non-continuous, such that surfaces of the drill bit are afforded areas which are not coated by the hard material, wherein upon rotation of the drill bit, the cumulative effect of the coated areas gives complete circumferential coverage of the dimensions of the drilled wellbore.

12. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 11, wherein the intermediate material is nickel.

13. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 12, wherein the intermediate material is brass.

14. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 13, wherein the preformed elements have a reinforced structure to aid drilling of hard formations.

15. The drill bit as claimed in claim 14, wherein the preformed elements are pre-weakened prior to attachment to the nose in order to allow fracture of the preformed elements upon drilling.

16. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 15, further comprising a plurality of flow ports to allow fluid bypass and lubrication of the bit.

17. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 16, further comprising a stabilizer or centralizer.

18. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 17, further comprising reaming members.

19. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 18, wherein the intermediate material and the hard material are disposed on at least a leading edge or cutting surface of each cutting member.

20. A drill bit for drilling with casing in a wellbore comprising:

a nose;

cutting members disposed on the nose, and being made from a combination of a relatively soft base material and a relatively soft bonding material, the cutting members having preformed elements made from a relatively hard material; wherein

the hard material is suitable for cutting earth or rock;

the cutting members are made substantially from the base material; and

the bonding material is disposed on at least a leading edge or cutting surface of each cutting member between the hard material and the base material so that, when the nose is drilled through by a standard earth bit, the bonding material will not substantially impede separation of the preformed elements, thereby allowing the standard earth bit to drill through the drill bit without substantially damaging the standard earth bit.

21. The drill bit as claimed in claim 20, wherein the bonding material is nickel or brass.

22. The drill bit as claimed in claim 20 or 21, wherein the cutting members are disposed proximate to a centre of the nose.

23. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 20, 21 or 22, wherein the hard material is selected from one of tungsten carbide, diamond composite and cubic boron nitride.

24. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 20 to 23, wherein the base material is selected from one of aluminium, copper, and brass alloy.

25. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 20 to 24, wherein the preformed elements have a reinforced structure to aid drilling of hard formations.

26. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 20 to 25, wherein the preformed elements are pre-weakened prior to attachment to the nose in order to allow fracture of the preformed elements upon drill through by the standard earth bit.

27. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 20 to 26, further comprising a stabilizer or centralizer.

28. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 20 to 27, further comprising reaming members.

29. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 20 to 28, wherein the nose further comprises a flow port.

30. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 20 to 29, wherein the bonding material is nickel.

31. The drill bit as claimed in any one of claims 20 to 30, further comprising a body, wherein the nose is disposed on the body and the body is made substantially from the base material.

32. A drill bit for drilling with casing in a wellbore, comprising:

a nose; and

cutting members disposed on the nose and made from a combination of a relatively soft base material, a

relatively soft intermediate material, and a relatively hard material, wherein:

the hard material is suitable for cutting earth or rock;

the combination of materials is in such proportion and in such arrangement to allow a standard earth drill bit to drill through said drill bit without substantially damaging said standard earth bit;

the cutting members are substantially made from the base material, and

the intermediate material is amenable to the base material and disposed between the hard material and the base material;

the hard material is applied to the cutting members as preformed elements,

the cumulative effect of said preformed elements is to cover the surface of the cutting members, thereby acting as a coating thereof, and

the preformed elements have a reinforced structure to aid drilling of hard formations.

33. A method for casing-while-drilling a well bore through earth and rock, comprising:

attaching a first drill bit to a string of casing, the first drill bit being constructed from a combination of a relatively soft material and a superhard material that is suitable for cutting the earth and rock, the combination of materials being in such proportion and in such arrangement to allow a subsequent second drill bit, suitable for cutting the earth and rock, to drill through the first drill bit, and the first drill bit comprising a nose of the relatively soft material, with the superhard material attached thereto;

drilling the well bore through the earth and rock with the first drill bit on the casing; and

subsequently running the second drill bit inside the casing within the well bore and drilling through the first drill bit with the second drill bit;

characterised in that:

a) the soft material is aluminium, copper or brass alloy;

b) an intermediate material that is different to, but amenable to, the soft material is provided between the nose and the superhard material, and

c) at least some of the superhard material is located within the projection of the internal circumference of the casing on the nose.

34. A method as claimed in claim 33, wherein the superhard material is diamond composite or cubic boron nitride.

35. A method as claimed in claim 33 or 34, wherein the first drill bit includes a plurality of different superhard materials.

36. A method as claimed in claim 33, 34 or 35, wherein the superhard material is provided as a coating, the coating being a continuous layer or film, or being non-continuous such that surfaces of the first drill bit are afforded areas which are not coated by the superhard material and such that, upon rotation of the first drill bit, the cumulative effect of the coated areas gives complete circumferential coverage of the dimensions of the drilled well bore.

37. A method as claimed in any one of claims 33 to 36, wherein the superhard material is applied to the nose as preformed elements and the cumulative effect of said preformed elements is to cover the surface of the nose and so act as a coating thereof.

38. A method as claimed in claim 37, wherein the preformed elements are chips or fragments of the superhard material of such a size as to substantially disintegrate upon being drilled through by the second drill bit.

39. A method as claimed in claim 37 or 38, wherein the preformed elements have a reinforced structure to aid drilling of hard formations and are pre-weakened prior to attachment to the nose in order to allow fracture of the preformed elements upon being drilled through by the second drill bit.

40. A method as claimed in any one of claims 33 to 39, wherein the intermediate material is nickel.

41. A method as claimed in any one of claims 33 to 40, wherein the first drill bit includes a plurality of flow ports to allow fluid bypass and lubrication of the bit.

42. A method as claimed in any one of claims 33 to 41, wherein the first drill bit is provided with a stabiliser or centraliser.

43. A method as claimed in any one of claims 33 to 42, wherein the first drill bit is provided with reaming members.

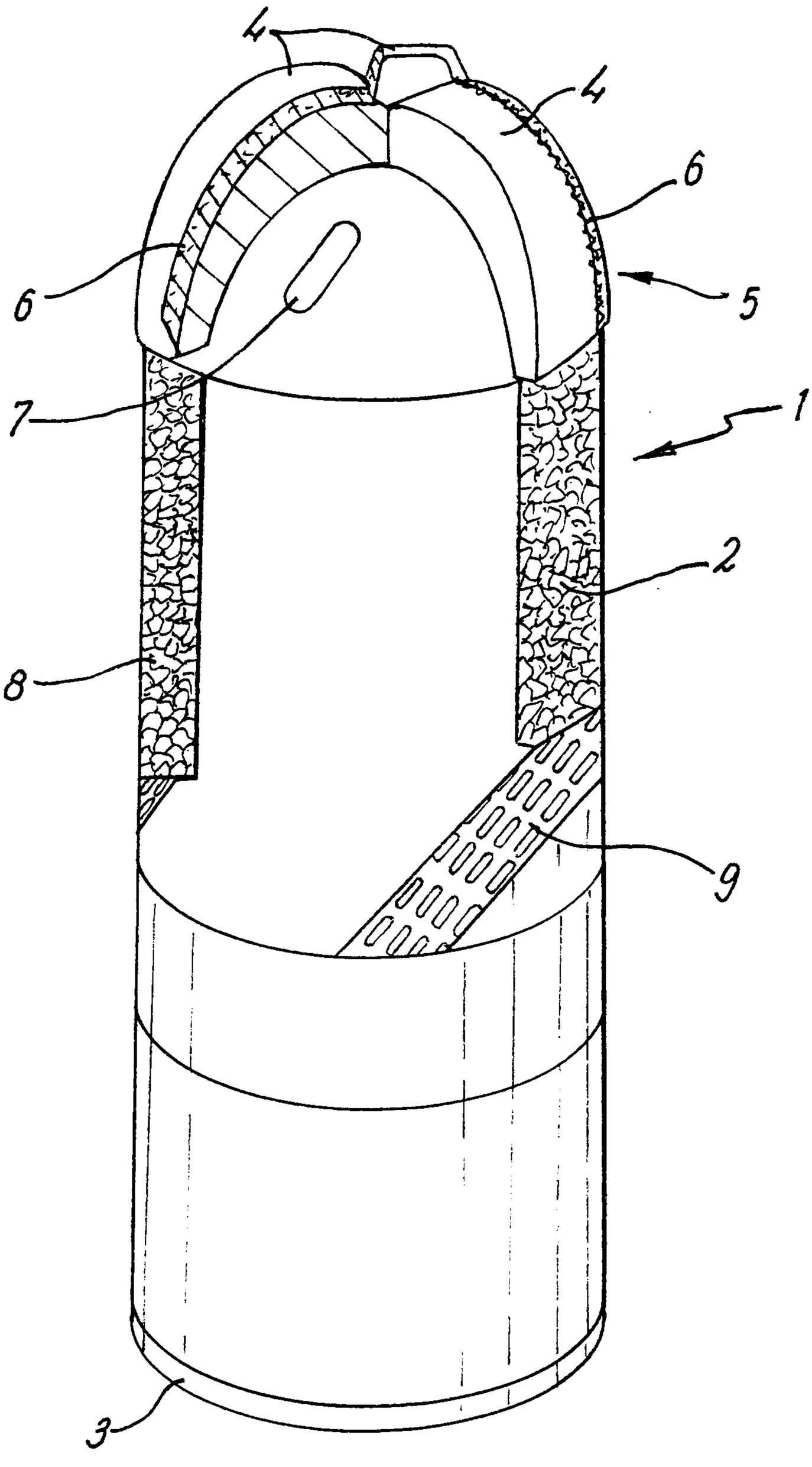


FIG. 1

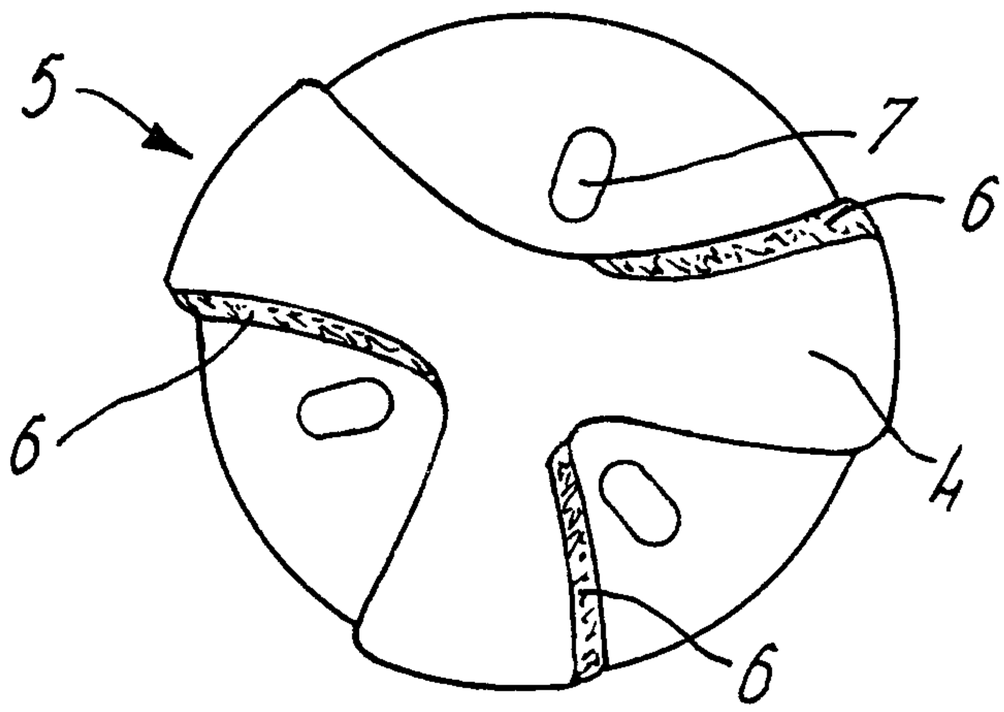


FIG. 2

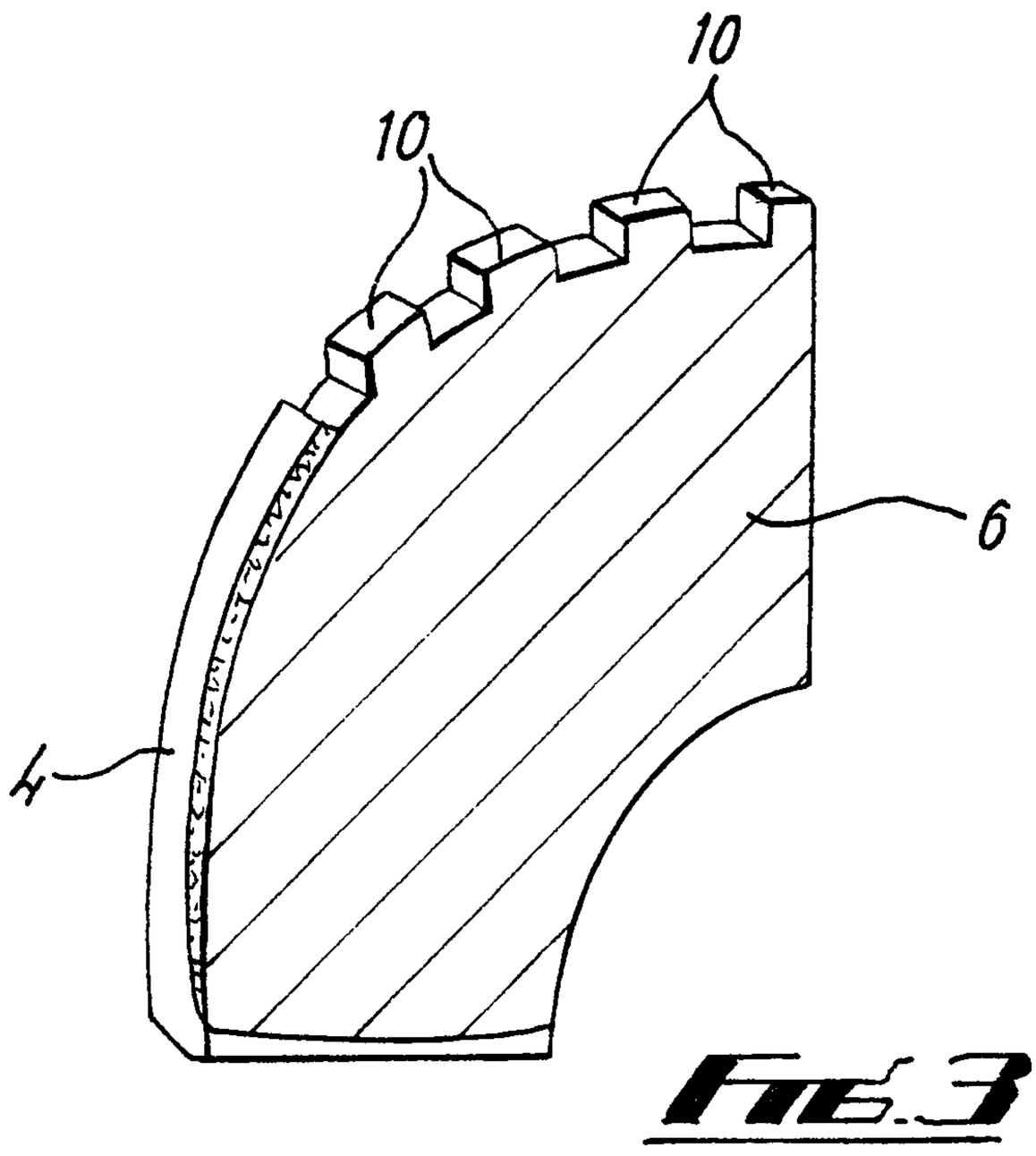


FIG. 3

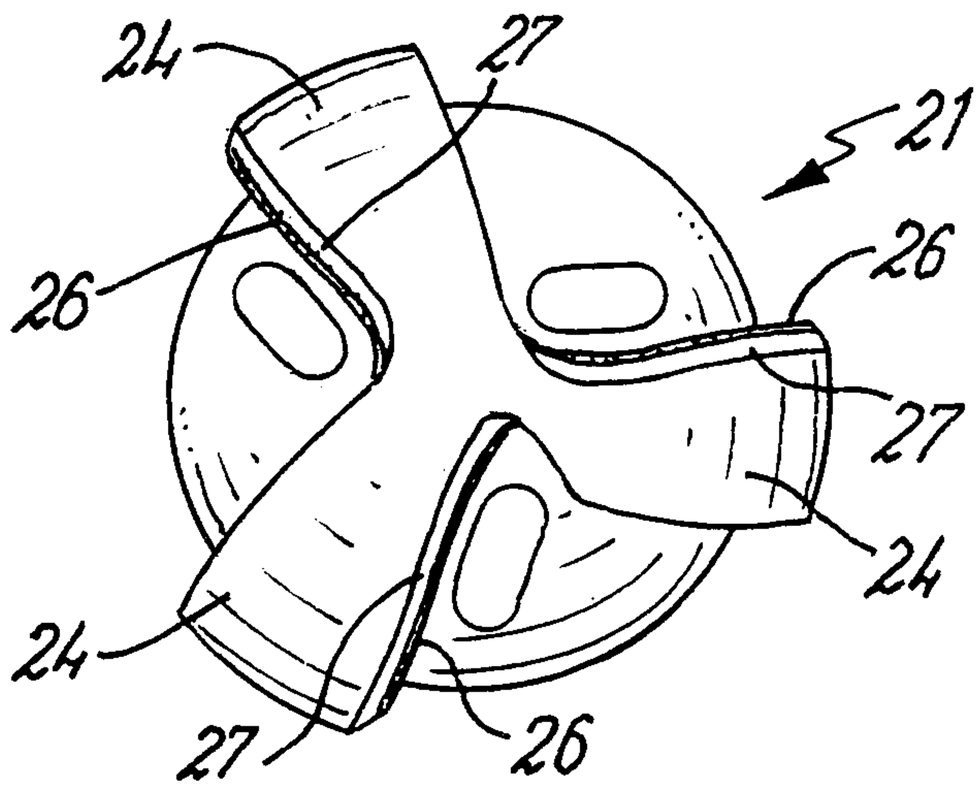


FIG.4

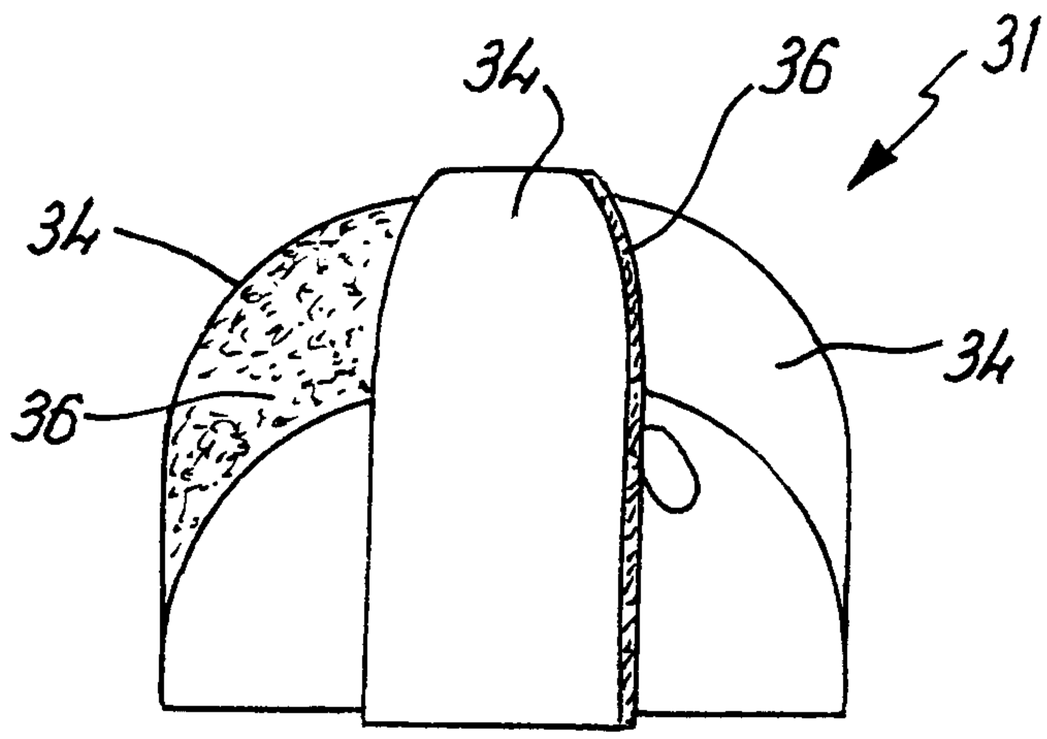
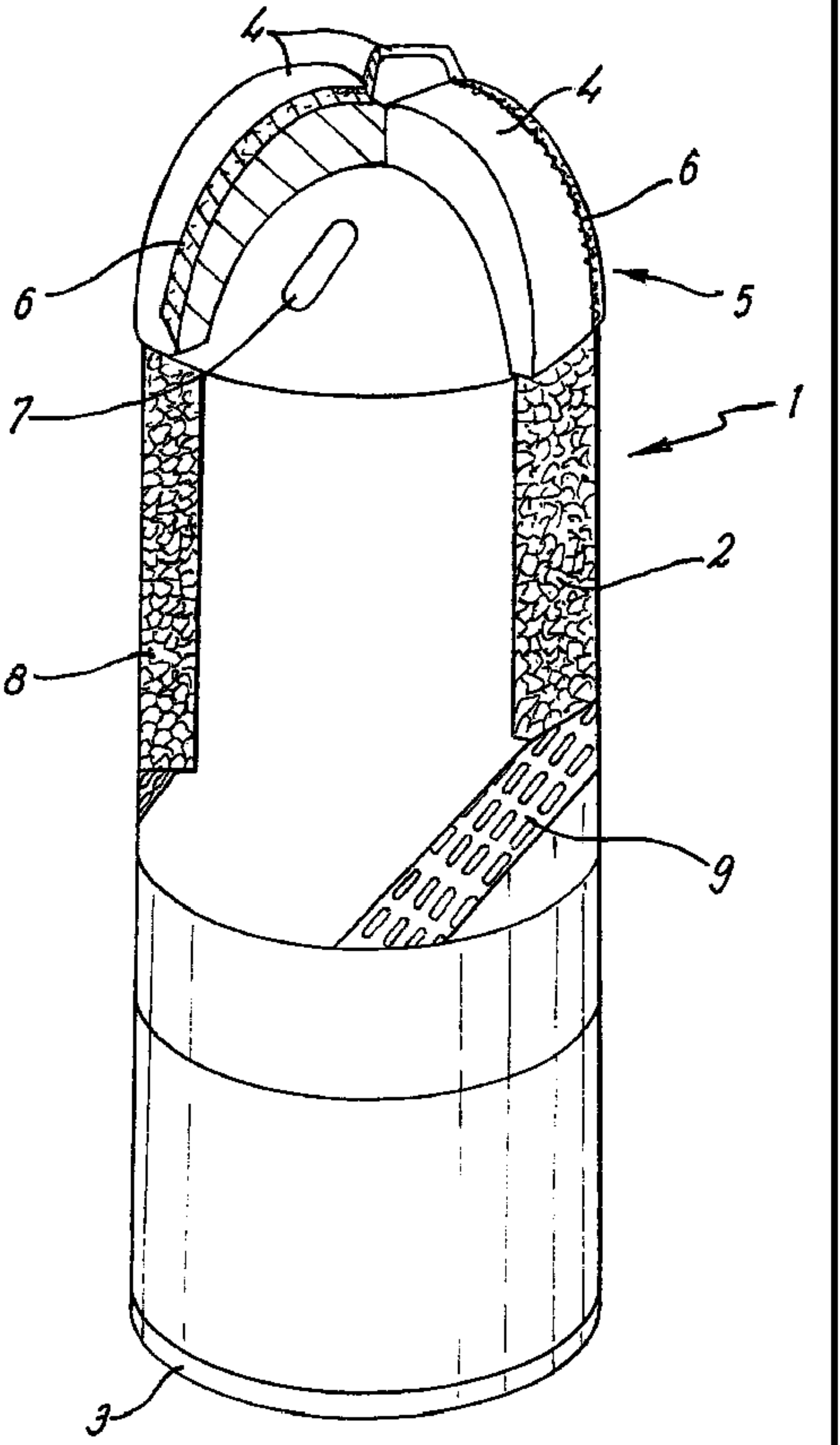


FIG.5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