



(12) **United States Patent**
Aronson, II et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 7,699,601 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Apr. 20, 2010**

(54) **TORCH HAVING A CONTINUOUS-FLAME MODE**

(75) Inventors: **Louis V. Aronson, II**, Oldwick, NJ (US);
Adam Grabicki, Parsippany, NJ (US)

(73) Assignee: **Zippo Manufacturing Company**,
Bradford, PA (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 19 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **11/974,194**

(22) Filed: **Oct. 11, 2007**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**
US 2009/0098494 A1 Apr. 16, 2009

(51) **Int. Cl.**
F23D 11/36 (2006.01)
F23D 14/28 (2006.01)
F23Q 7/12 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **431/153; 431/255; 431/344**

(58) **Field of Classification Search** **431/153, 431/255, 344; 34/96**
See application file for complete search history.

(56) **References Cited**
U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

1,159,015 A	11/1915	Gibbs	
1,509,671 A	9/1924	Fish et al.	
2,631,891 A	3/1953	Kochner et al.	
3,220,459 A *	11/1965	Wilson	431/255
3,799,447 A	3/1974	Beal	
4,909,443 A	3/1990	Takagi	
5,090,893 A *	2/1992	Floriot	431/153
5,183,322 A	2/1993	Haruch	
5,660,333 A	8/1997	Strahman et al.	
5,741,128 A *	4/1998	Tsai	431/255
5,788,474 A *	8/1998	Chung et al.	431/153
5,788,476 A *	8/1998	Sher	431/153
5,833,145 A	11/1998	Smith	

5,967,768 A *	10/1999	Saito et al.	431/153
6,102,689 A *	8/2000	Man	431/153
6,173,911 B1	1/2001	Hui-Chen et al.	
6,196,833 B1 *	3/2001	Ho	431/153
6,260,774 B1	7/2001	Erickson	
6,293,782 B1	9/2001	Tsai et al.	
6,296,476 B1 *	10/2001	Tsai	431/153
6,352,212 B1	3/2002	Wang et al.	
6,425,538 B1	7/2002	Heren	
6,527,543 B2 *	3/2003	Tsai	431/153
6,685,110 B2	2/2004	Wang et al.	
6,719,219 B1	4/2004	Wang et al.	

(Continued)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

U.S. Appl. No. 11/605,194.

(Continued)

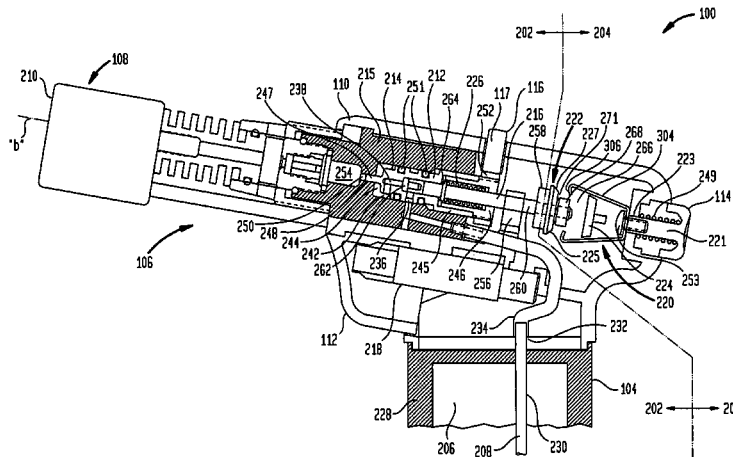
Primary Examiner—Kenneth B Rinehart
Assistant Examiner—Frances Kamps

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm*—Barry I. Friedman, Esq.; Metz Lewis LLC

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A hand-held torch includes a housing. A fuel flow path is defined within the housing. A plunger is movable within the housing to control fuel flow through the fuel flow path. An engagement portion is coupled to the plunger. A latching mechanism having at least one claw is movable to engage the engagement portion when the plunger is positioned to allow fuel flow through the fuel flow path. An actuator is coupled to the latching mechanism and exposed for manipulation by a user to move the latching mechanism into engagement with the engagement portion.

29 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



US 7,699,601 B2

Page 2

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

6,758,413 B1 7/2004 Chen et al.
6,959,742 B2* 11/2005 Aronson et al. 141/383
7,025,291 B2 4/2006 Wu et al.
2003/0203331 A1 10/2003 Hsu
2004/0149350 A1* 8/2004 Aronson et al. 141/383

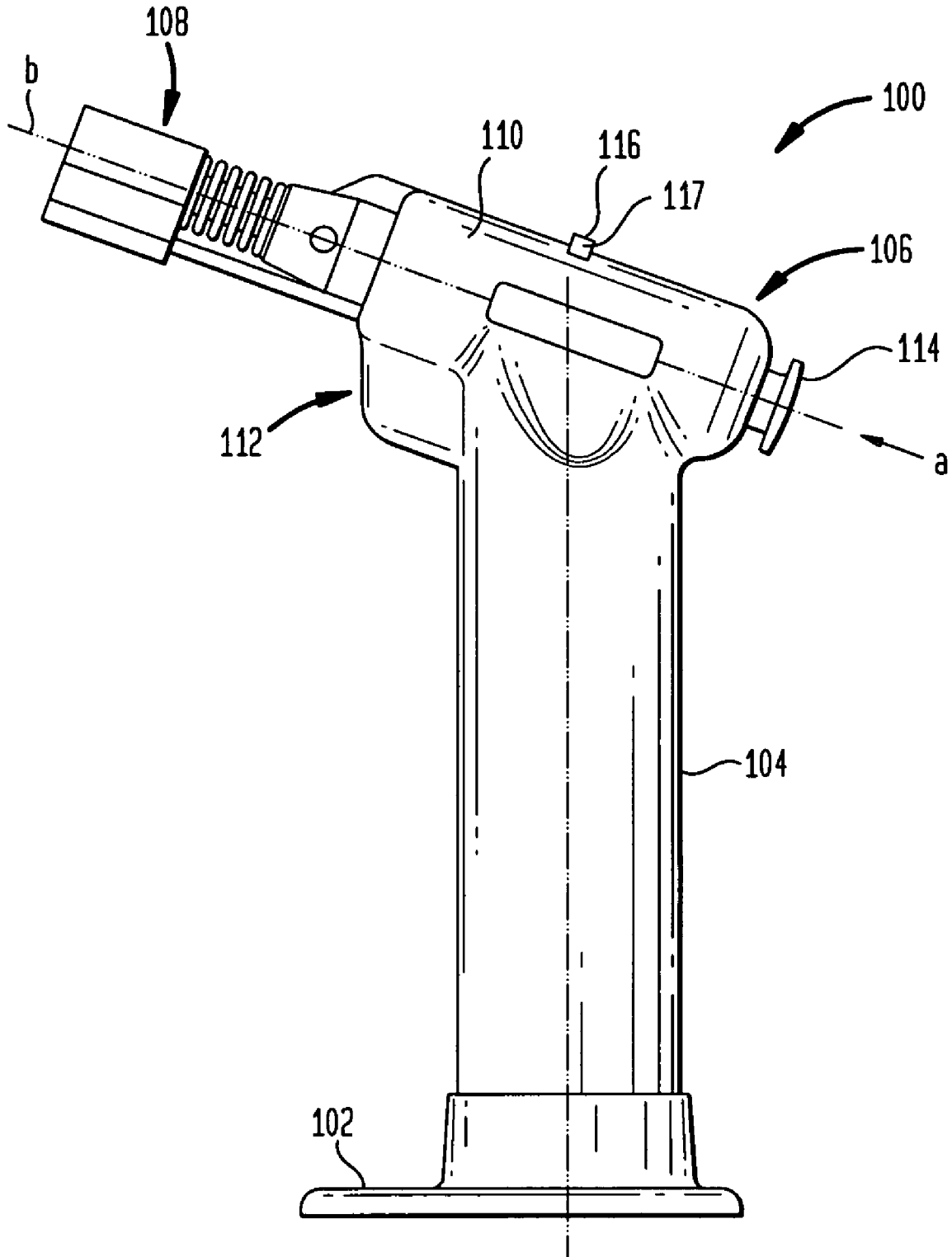
2006/0049283 A1 3/2006 Lee

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

International Search Report and Written Opinion, PCT/US07/24484.

* cited by examiner

FIG. 1



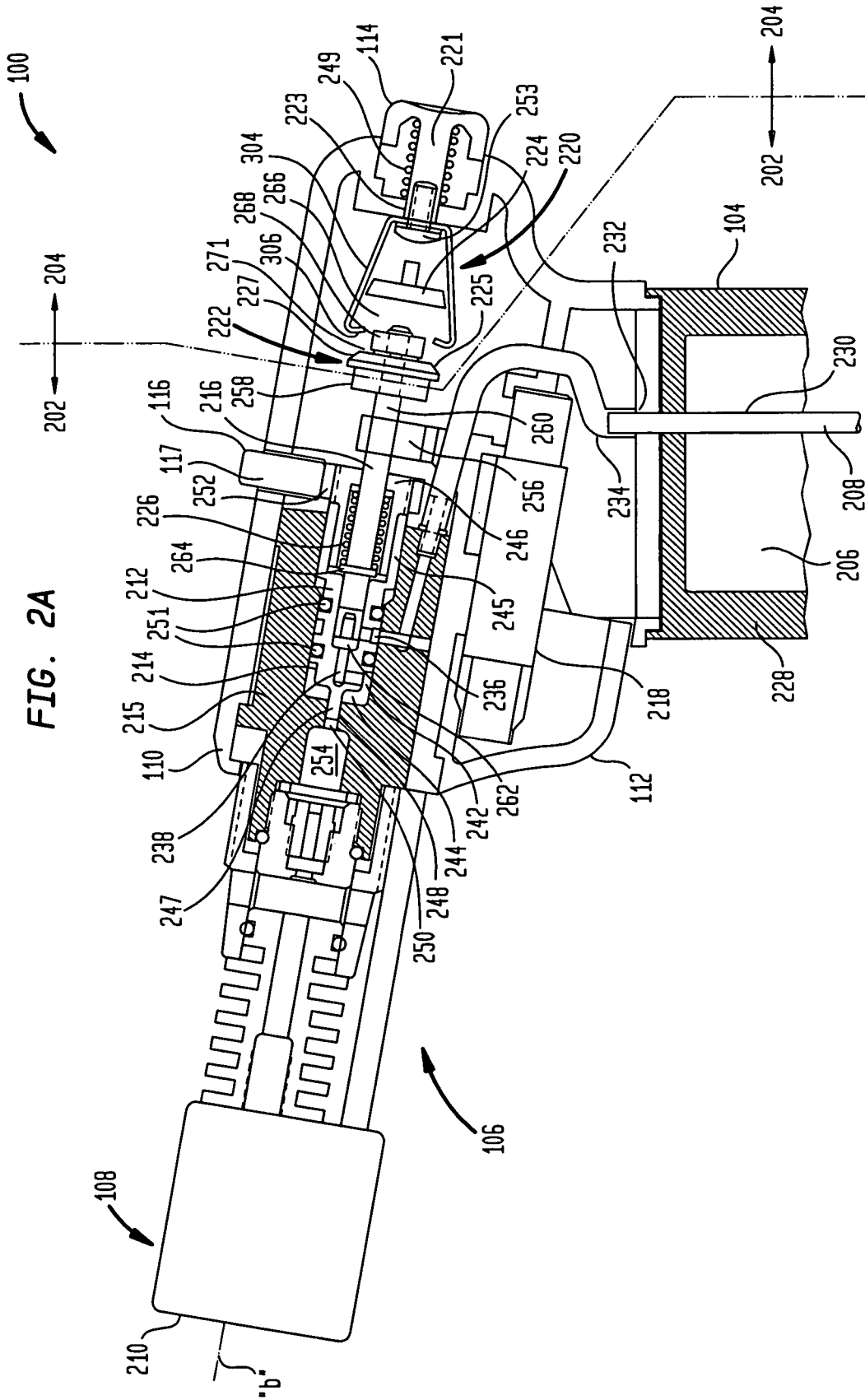


FIG. 2B

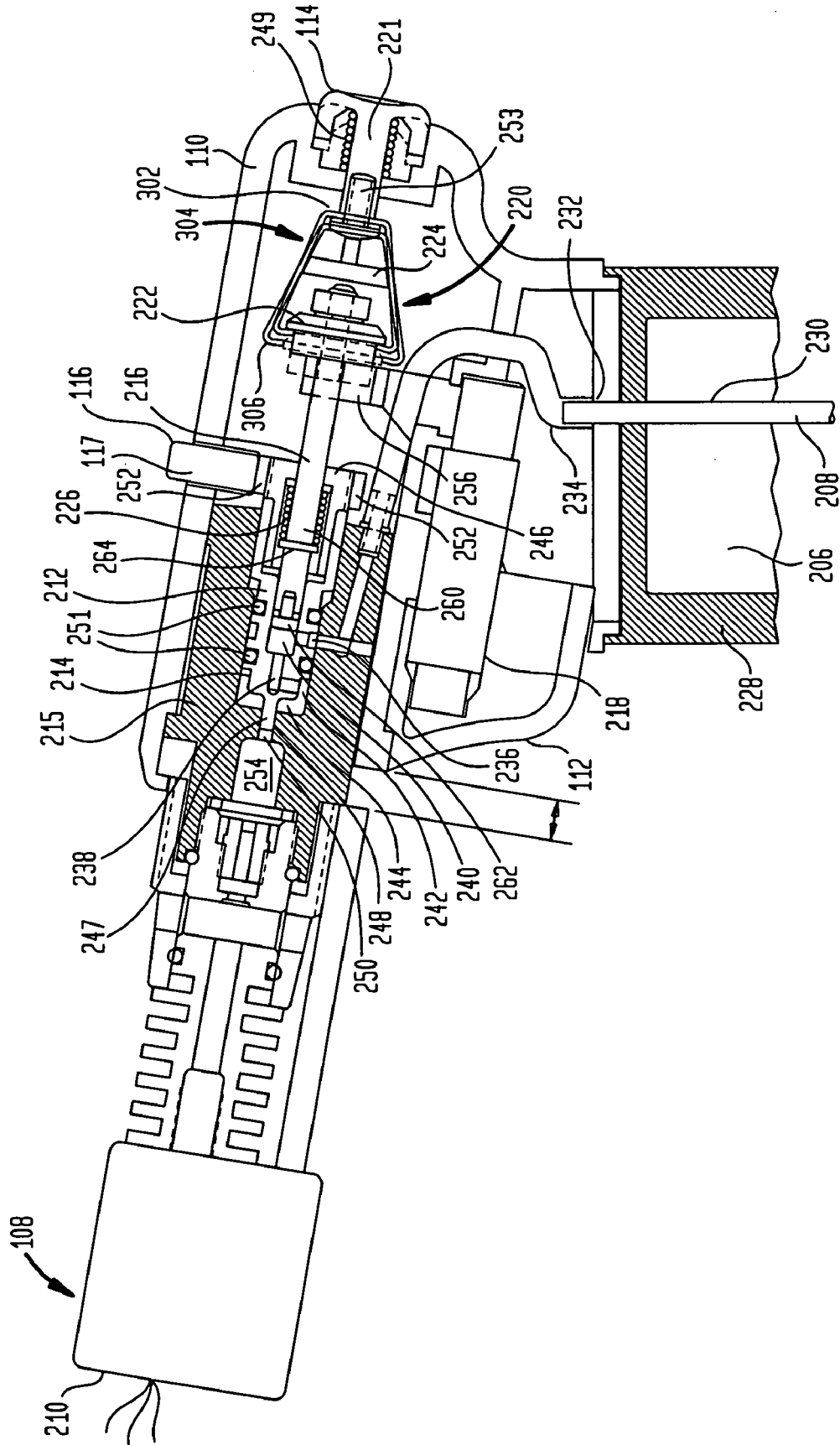
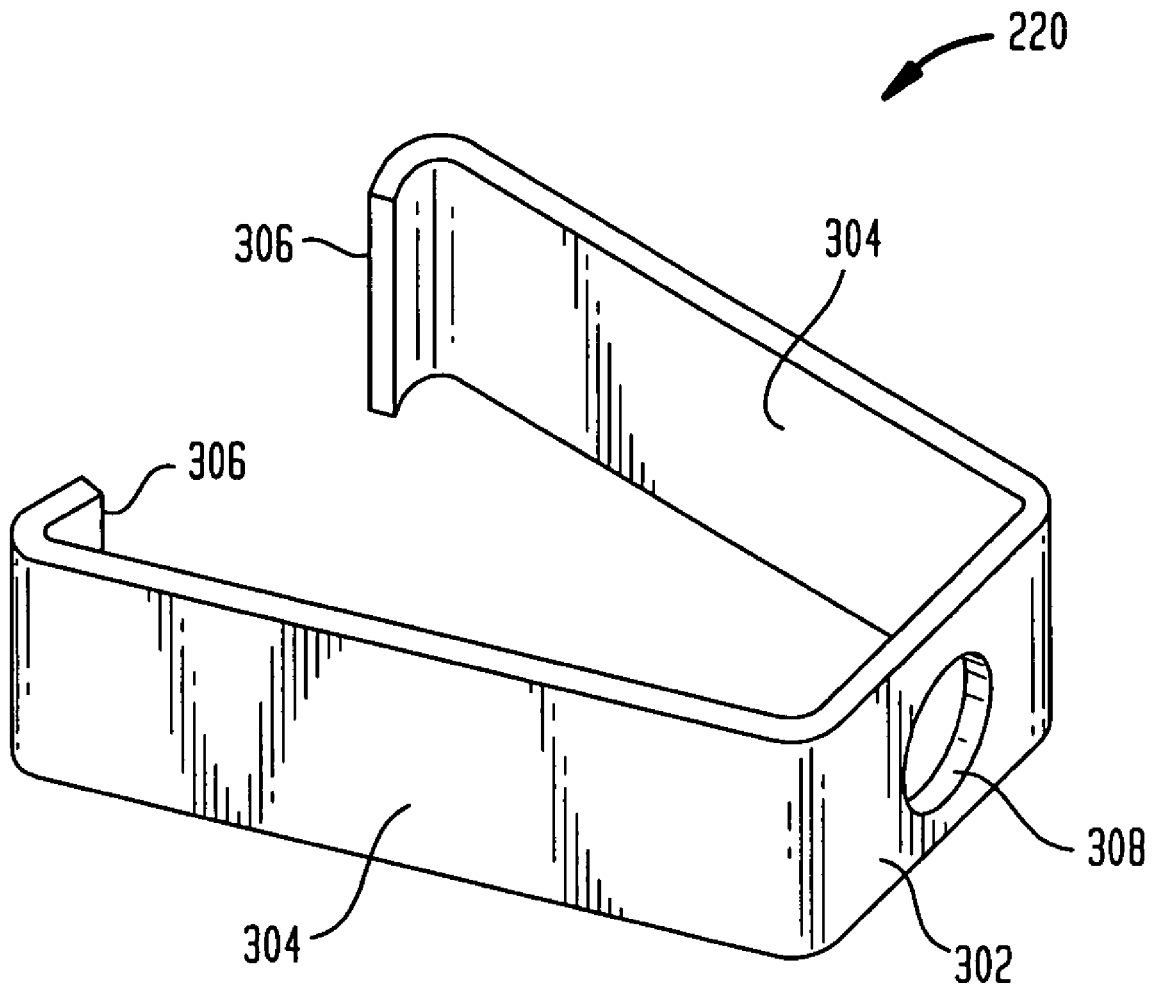


FIG. 3



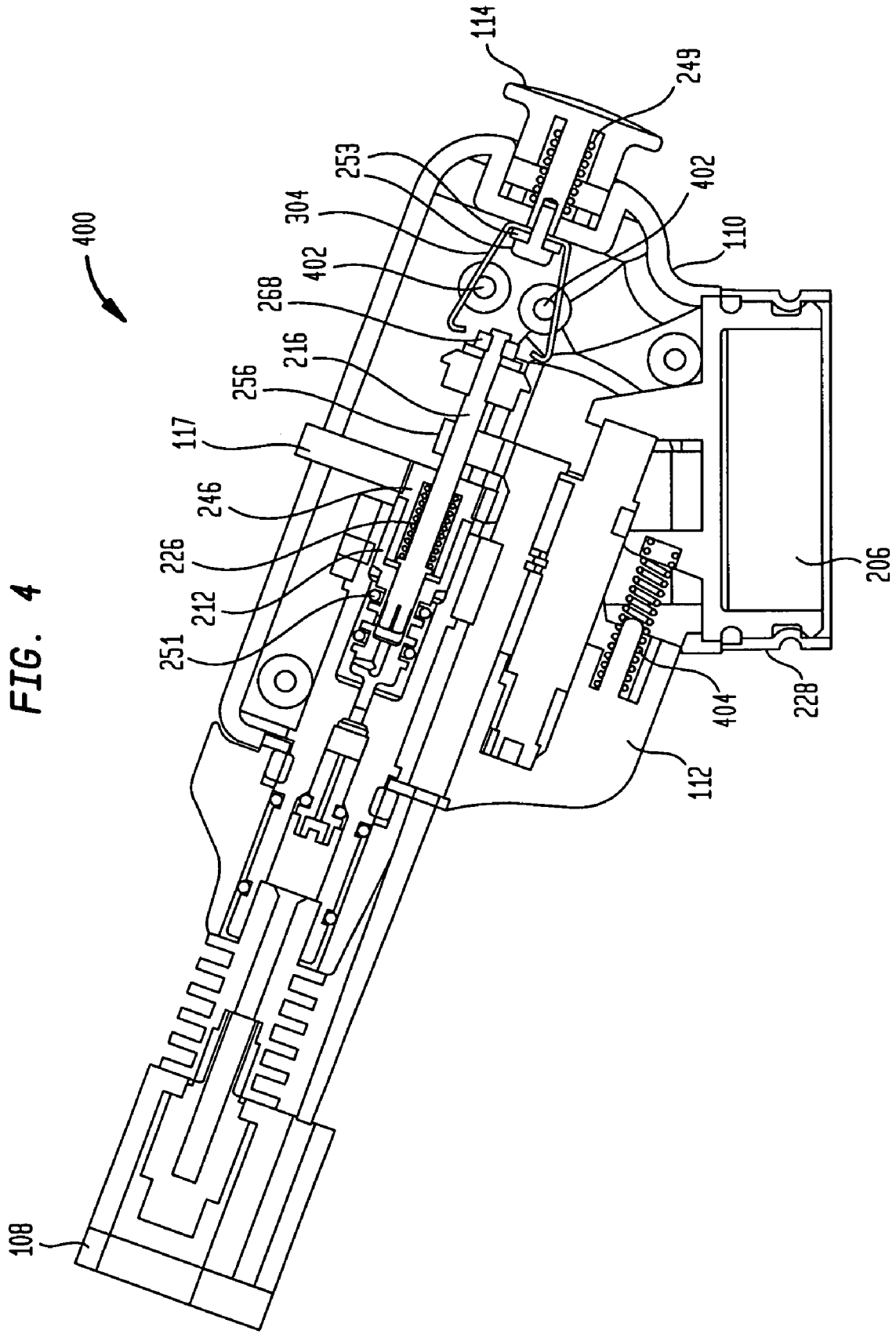


FIG. 4

FIG. 5A

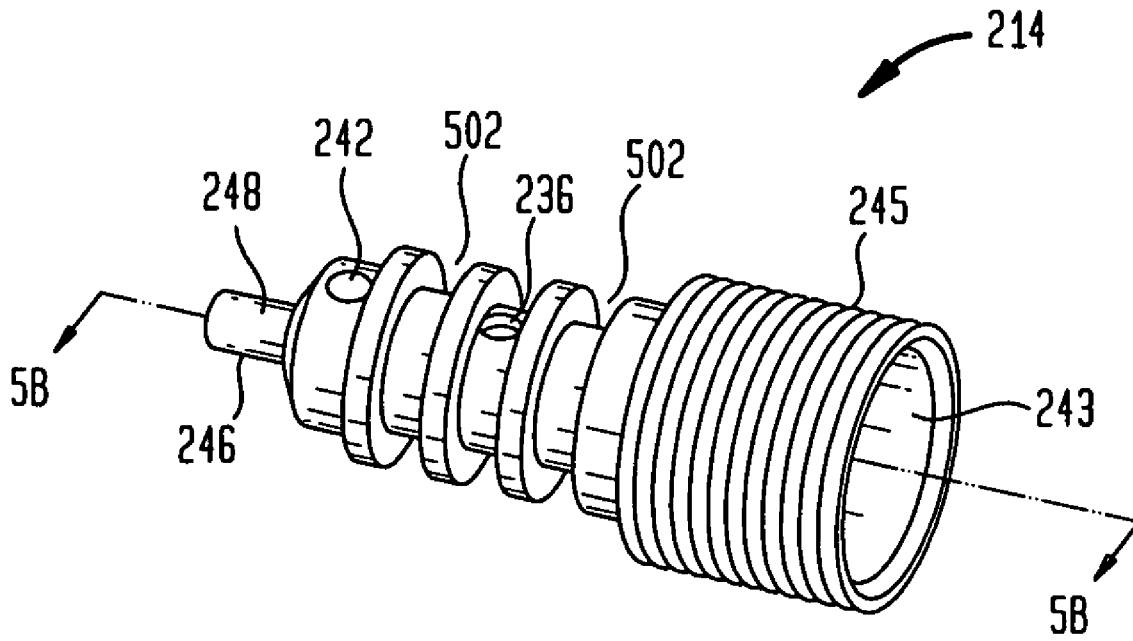


FIG. 5B

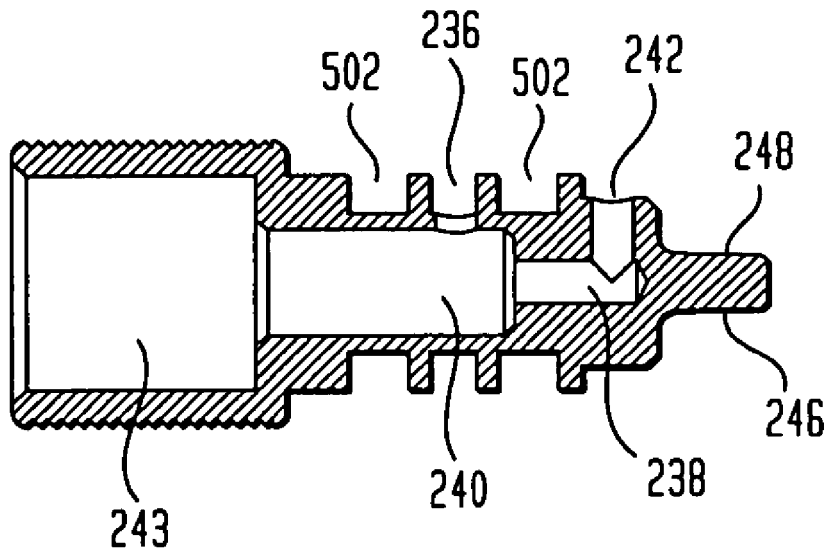


FIG. 6A

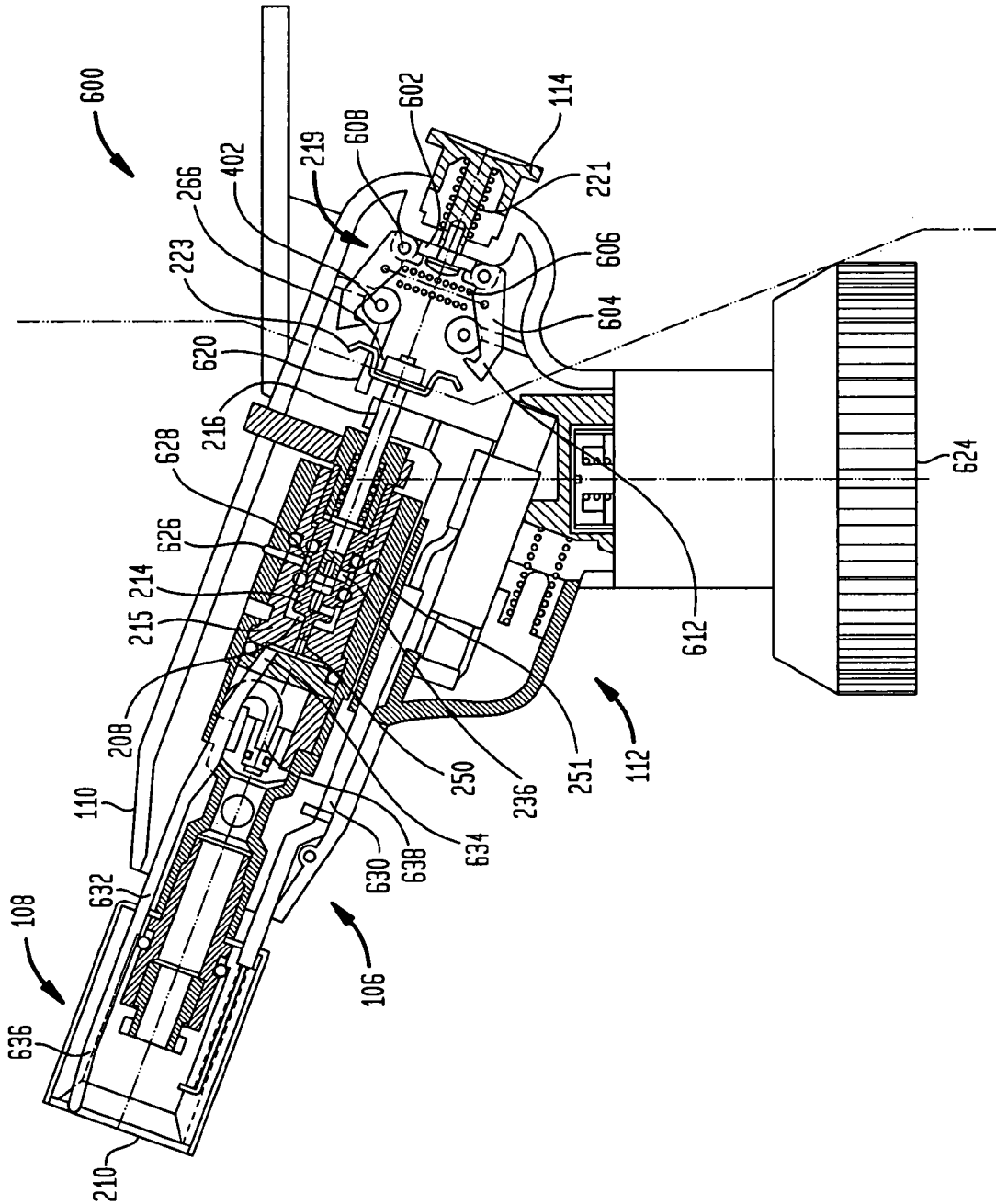


FIG. 6B

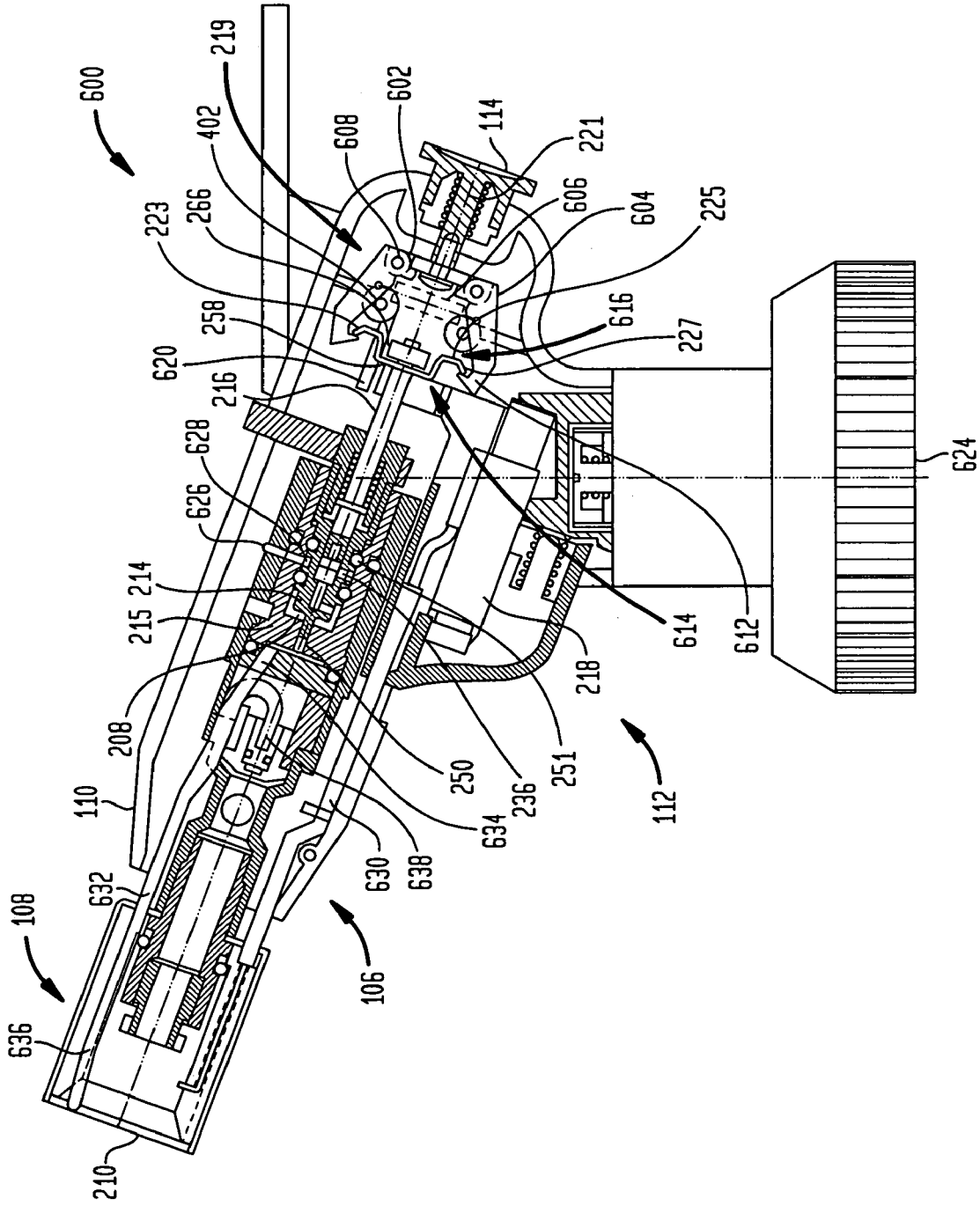
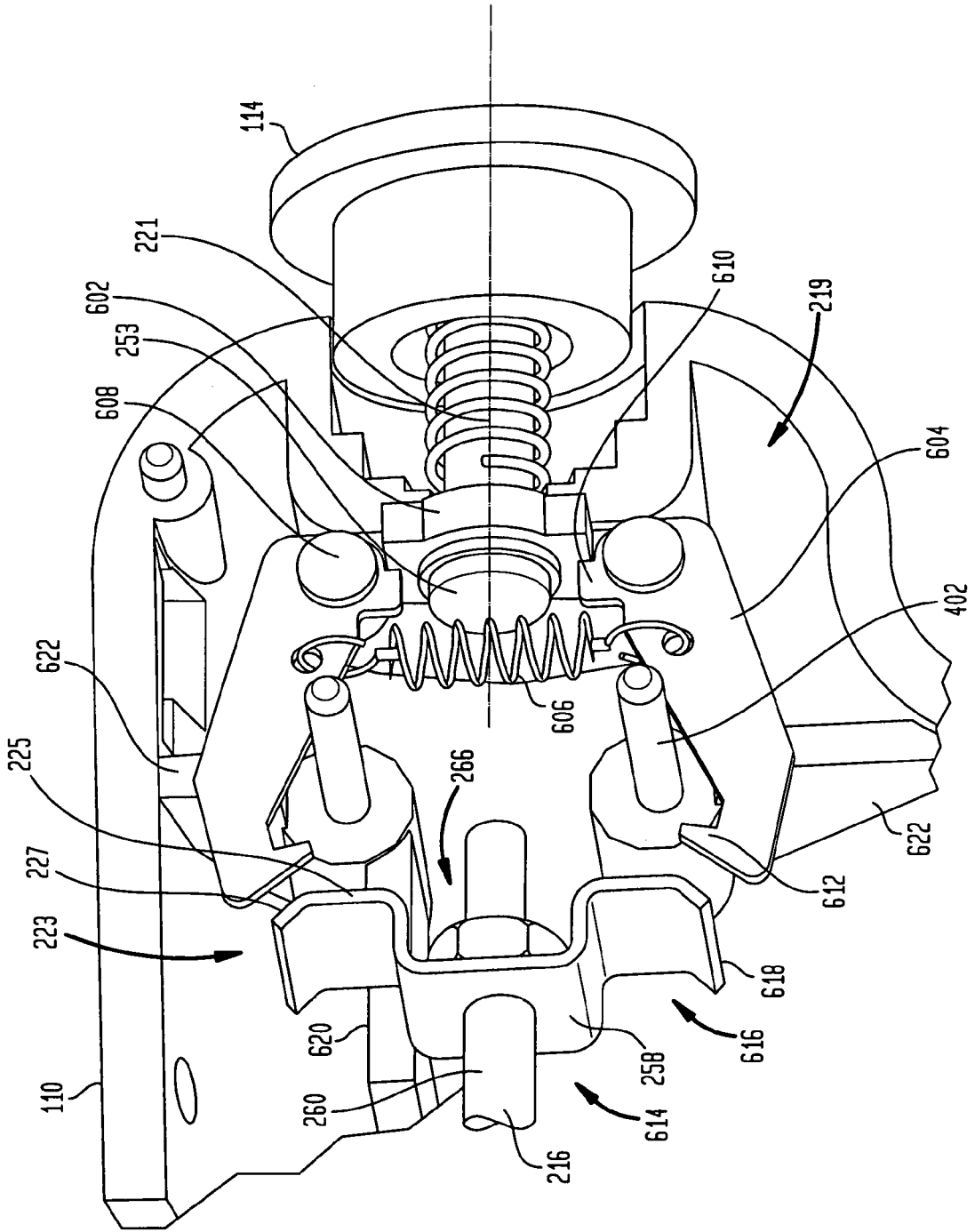


FIG. 7



1

**TORCH HAVING A CONTINUOUS-FLAME
MODE**

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a torch and, more particularly, to a torch with a continuous-flame mode.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Known torches include hand-held, flame producing products that operate on fuel, incorporate an ignition mechanism and are used by consumers to ignite a variety of items. Some torches include a continuous-flame operating mode.

For example, U.S. Pat. No. 6,196,833, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference, discloses a fuel burner that has a trigger, a safety switch, a protrusion rod extended through the safety switch and a positioning pin that can be pressed to keep the burner in a flame-spouting state. To initially establish a flame, the safety switch and the protrusion rod are manipulated and the trigger is pulled. Once a flame has been established, the positioning pin can be pressed to engage the trigger and thereby keep the burner in a flame-spouting state.

Improvements are desirable in the field of torches having a continuous-flame operating mode.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In one aspect, a hand-held torch includes a housing. A fuel flow path is defined within the housing. A plunger is movable within the housing to control fuel flow through the fuel flow path. An engagement portion is coupled to the plunger. A latching mechanism is movable to engage the engagement portion when the plunger is in a position allowing fuel flow through the fuel flow path. A continuous-flame mode actuator is coupled to the latching mechanism and exposed for manipulation by a user to move the latching mechanism into engagement with the engagement portion.

In a typical embodiment, the latching mechanism engaging the engagement portion prevents the plunger from moving into a position to block the fuel flow path.

According to another aspect, a hand-held torch includes a housing. A fuel flow path is defined within the housing. A plunger is movable within the housing to control fuel flow through the fuel flow path. An engagement portion is coupled to the plunger. A child-resistant actuator is adapted for manipulation by a user to move the plunger. A latching mechanism is movable to engage the engagement portion when the plunger is in a position allowing fuel flow through the fuel flow path. A continuous-flame mode actuator is exposed for manipulation by a user to cause the latching mechanism to engage the engagement portion.

In yet another aspect, a method of operating a hand-held, continuous-flame mode torch includes moving a plunger in the torch to an open position to establish fuel flow through a fuel flow path in the torch. The flowing fuel is ignited to create a flame at an outlet of the fuel flow path. With the plunger in the open position, a latching mechanism engages an engagement portion on the plunger to maintain fuel flow through the fuel flow path.

In yet another aspect, a method of operating a hand-held, continuous-flame mode torch includes moving a plunger in the torch to an open position to establish fuel flow through a fuel flow path in the torch. The flowing fuel is ignited to create a flame at an outlet of the fuel flow path. With the plunger in the open position, a latching mechanism having a pair of

2

rotatable claws is manipulated into engagement with a portion of an engagement portion on the plunger to maintain the plunger in the open position whereby fuel flow is maintained through the fuel flow path.

According to yet another aspect, a hand-held torch includes a housing, a fuel flow path defined in the housing, a flow control means for controlling fuel flow through the fuel flow path, a latching means for engaging the flow control means and a continuous-flame actuator means for moving the latching means into engagement with the flow control means whereby said flow control means provides continuous flow of said fuel through said fuel flow path.

In one embodiment of the present invention, there is a hand-held torch comprising a housing; a fuel flow path defined within the housing; a plunger movable within the housing to control fuel flow through the fuel flow path; an engagement portion coupled to the plunger; a latching mechanism including at least one rotatable claw movable to engage the engagement portion when the plunger is in a position allowing fuel flow through the fuel flow path; and a continuous-flame mode actuator coupled to the latching mechanism and exposed for manipulation by a user to move said at least one claw into engagement with the engagement portion.

In a further embodiment of the present invention there is a hand-held torch comprising a housing; a fuel flow path defined within the housing; a plunger movable within the housing to control fuel flow through the fuel flow path; an engagement portion coupled to the plunger; a child-resistant flame actuator coupled to the housing and exposed for manipulation by a user to move the plunger; a latching mechanism movable to engage the engagement portion when the plunger is in a position allowing fuel flow through the fuel flow path, the latching mechanism comprising a pair of claws rotatably coupled to a base element and; and a continuous-flame mode actuator exposed for manipulation by a user to cause said pair of claws of said latching element to engage the engagement portion.

In a further embodiment of the present invention there is a continuous-flame mode assembly for facilitating a continuous-flame mode of a hand-held torch having a fluid flow control plunger, comprising an engagement portion coupled to the plunger; a latching mechanism including at least one rotatable claw movable to engage the engagement portion, thereby activating the continuous-flame mode; a continuous-flame mode actuator coupled to the latching mechanism and exposed for manipulation by a user to move said claw into engagement with the engagement portion, thereby maintaining the continuous-flame mode.

In general, a torch is disclosed that is simple to operate. The torch can optionally include provisions for child-resistant operation.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a side view of a hand-held torch that is capable of being operated in a continuous-flame mode.

FIGS. 2A and 2B are cutaway partial side-views of the torch shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of the latching mechanism of FIGS. 2A and 2B.

FIG. 4 is a cutaway partial side-view of an alternative embodiment of a hand-held torch that is capable of being operated in a continuous-flame mode.

FIG. 5A is a perspective view of the valve body of FIGS. 2A and 2B.

FIG. 5B is a cutaway side view of the valve body of FIGS. 2A and 2B.

FIGS. 6A and 6B are partial cutaway side-views of an alternative embodiment of a hand-held torch that is capable of being operated in a continuous-flame mode.

FIG. 7 is a perspective view of the continuous-flame mode assembly of FIGS. 6A and 6B.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In describing the preferred embodiments of the present invention, specific terminology will be resorted to for the sake of clarity. However, the invention is not intended to be limited to the specific terms so selected, and is understood that each specific term includes all technical equivalents which operate in a similar manner to accomplish the same purpose.

Referring now to the drawings, wherein like reference numerals represent like elements, FIG. 1 is a hand-held torch 100 that is capable of being operated in a continuous-flame mode in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

The illustrated torch 100 includes a base 102, a handle 104 coupled to the base 102 and a torch assembly 106 contained within a housing 110 which is coupled to the handle 104. In one embodiment, the handle 104 includes a fuel storage compartment operatively contained therein to supply fuel to the torch assembly 106. In other embodiments, however, the torch 100 is adapted to be coupled to a remotely-located or directly attached fuel supply. For example, one embodiment may include a fuel transfer adaptor configured to releasably attach to a fuel container, as disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,959,742, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. Such a fuel transfer adaptor in accordance with the present invention is shown in FIGS. 6A and 6B. One convenient fuel for the hand-held torch 100 is butane. In general, the torch assembly 106 is operable to deliver fuel from the fuel storage compartment, to ignite the fuel and to produce a flame at its nozzle 108.

A trigger 112 and a continuous-flame mode button 114 are coupled to the housing 110 and are operatively exposed for manipulation by a user. In one embodiment, successful manipulation of the trigger 112 results in the production of a flame at the nozzle 108. In those embodiments, manipulating the trigger 112 initiates fuel flow and ignites the flowing fuel. In some embodiments, the trigger 112 is spring-loaded in a manner that makes its operation child-resistant. More particularly, in those embodiments, the force required to overcome the spring-loading resists successful operation of the trigger 112 by young children.

In the preferred embodiment of the torch 100, the torch 100 can be operated in a continuous-flame mode. In this regard, if the button 114 is manipulated (i.e., pressed in the direction indicated by arrow "a" and then released while a flame is being produced), the torch 100 enters the continuous-flame mode. Once continuous-flame mode has been established, only releasing the trigger 112 will not cause the flame to extinguish. If the torch 100 is operating in the continuous-flame mode, that mode can be deactivated by manipulating (i.e., pressing and releasing) the button 114 again. In some embodiments, deactivating the continuous-flame mode requires pressing the button 114 deeper than is required to activate the continuous-flame mode.

Continuous-flame mode is an operational mode, in which the torch 100 can maintain a flame at the nozzle 108 as long as fuel is available, even if the trigger 112 is released. Activating the continuous-flame mode might be desirable in applications, such as soldering, where it is helpful to have a flame

available for an extended period of time. It may be desirable to activate the continuous-flame mode in a variety of other applications, as well.

The illustrated torch 100 also includes an (optional) flame adjuster 116 coupled to the housing 110 and operatively exposed for manipulation by a user. Manipulation of the flame adjuster 116 affects the intensity of the flame that is produced at the nozzle 108. In the illustrated embodiment, the flame adjuster 116 includes a lever 117 that is adapted for movement back and forth within a slot in the housing 110. Moving the lever 117 in one direction increases the flame's intensity, while moving the lever 117 in the opposite direction decreases the flame's intensity. The flame adjuster 116 controls the rate at which fuel can flow to the nozzle 108 when the torch 100 is producing a flame.

FIGS. 2A and 2B are cutaway partial side-views of the torch 100 shown in FIG. 1. In FIG. 2A, the torch assembly 106 is off (i.e., it is not producing a flame). In FIG. 2B, the torch assembly 106 is on (i.e., it is producing a flame) and is moving into a continuous-flame mode. Functionally, the illustrated torch 100 includes a flame initiating assembly 202 and a continuous-flame mode assembly 204.

The flame initiating assembly 202 includes a fuel storage compartment 206, a fuel flow path 208 that extends from the fuel storage compartment 206 to an outlet 210 of the torch's nozzle 108, a valve 212 that controls fuel flow through the fuel flow path 208 and the trigger 112 that is adapted for manipulation by a user to establish fuel flow through the fuel flow path 208 and to ignite a flame at the outlet 210 of the nozzle 108. The valve 212 includes a valve body 214 and a plunger 216 that can move through the valve body 214 to control fuel flow through the valve 212 and, therefore, through the fuel flow path 208. The valve body 214 is positioned within a valve nest 215. The valve nest 215 is positioned within the housing 110. The trigger 112 is adapted to move the plunger 216. The flame initiating assembly 202 also includes an optional flame adjuster lever 117 operatively coupled to the valve body 214 in such a manner that movement of the lever 117 causes the valve body 214 to move through the valve nest 215 in the housing 110 and, thereby, adjusts the rate at which fuel can flow through the fuel flow path 208. The flame initiating assembly 202 also includes an igniter 218 operatively coupled to the trigger 112 and adapted to produce an ignition spark in response to a user squeezing the trigger 112. In a preferred embodiment, the igniter 218 is a piezoelectric element, in which the motion of the trigger 112 causes a spring-loaded hammer to strike a piezoelectric crystal, thereby producing a voltage and resulting in a spark to ignite the fuel.

Such an igniter 218 is also illustrated in FIGS. 6A and 6B to be described hereinafter. In the illustrated embodiment, an extension 630, carries the voltage produced by the igniter 218 to the nozzle 108, where the resultant spark ignites the fuel exiting the nozzle 108.

Referring again to FIGS. 2A and 2B, the continuous-flame mode assembly 204 includes a continuous-flame mode actuator in the form of a spring-loaded button 114 that is exposed through the housing 110 for manipulation by a user to activate a continuous-flame mode, a latching mechanism 220 coupled to the button 114, a continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222 coupled to the plunger 216 and adapted for engagement with the latching mechanism 220 and a fixed element 224 secured to the housing 110 and positioned near the latching mechanism 220. The latching mechanism 220 is movable to engage the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222 on the plunger 216 when the plunger 216 is in an open position (i.e., when the plunger 216 is positioned as shown in FIG. 2B). Once engaged, the latching mechanism 220 pre-

5

vents the plunger 216 from moving to a closed position (i.e., a position wherein the plunger 216 entirely blocks the fuel flow path 208).

To disengage the latching mechanism 220 from the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222 on the plunger 216 and, thereby deactivate the continuous-flame mode, the latching mechanism 220 is adapted for movement in a manner that causes it to spread apart when in contact with the fixed element 224 and disengage the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222 on the plunger 216. Once the latching mechanism 220 disengages the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222, the plunger 216 is free to move to the closed position (shown in FIG. 2A) and does so under force from plunger spring 226.

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of the latching mechanism 220 of FIGS. 2A and 2B.

The illustrated latching mechanism 220 includes a substantially flat base 302. A pair of claws 304 extends from opposite sides of the base 302 in substantially the same direction, but angled slightly away from one another. Each claw 304 extends approximately an identical distance from the base 302. In the illustrated embodiment, the claws 304 are flexible. The distal ends 306 of the flexible claws 304 are bent inwardly so that the tips of the bent distal ends 306 face approximately towards each other. The base 302 includes a hole 308 for receiving a fastening element.

The claws 304 generally have some degree of flexibility, but also some degree of resilience, as well. In a typical implementation, the claws 304 should be flexible enough to flex outwardly to engage and to disengage a continuous-flame mode engagement portion (e.g., continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222) of a plunger. However, the claws 304 should be resilient enough to return to their original form after flexing in manners consistent with engaging and disengaging the engagement portion.

Turning again to FIGS. 2A and 2B, the pair of claws 304 extends from the base 302 of the latching mechanism 220 substantially toward the plunger 216. Each claw 304 is angled slightly outward relative to the axis of the plunger 216. The button 114 has a stem 221 that passes through an opening 223 in the housing 110. The base 302 of the latching mechanism 220 is coupled to the stem 221 with a fastening element 253 that passes through a hole (i.e., hole 308 in FIG. 3) in the base 302. As such, the latching mechanism 220 and the button 114 are adapted to move together axially. Each claw 304 has a distal end 306 that is bent inwardly to facilitate gripping the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222 on the plunger 216. A spring 249 is positioned between the housing 110 and the button 114 and is arranged to provide spring-loading for the button 114 in an outward direction.

As illustrated, the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222 includes a lip 225 with an angled surface 227 that is exposed for contact with the distal ends 306 of the latching mechanism 220. The angled surface 227 is formed so that the end of the angled surface 227 closest to the button 114 has a smaller diameter than the end of the angled surface 227 farthest from the button 114. A step is formed by the forward end of the lip 225 and the trigger engagement portion 258, which has a smaller diameter than the forward end of the lip 225. That step enables the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222 to be gripped (as shown in FIG. 2B) by the distal ends 306 of the claws 304.

The fixed element 224 is coupled to the housing 110 and, therefore, is stationary with respect to the housing 110. The fixed element 224 extends between the claws 304 in such a manner that the fixed element 224 will contact the claws 304 when the claws 304 are moved forward from a position

6

engaged to the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222. The illustrated fixed element 224 has a pair of beveled surfaces 293, each of which is adapted to contact one of the claws 304.

The illustrated flame initiating assembly 202 includes a fuel storage compartment 206 adapted to store pressurized fuel therein. The fuel storage compartment 206 has a housing 228, a portion of which forms the torch's handle 104. The housing 228 is securely coupled to the torch assembly 106.

The fuel flow path 208 extends from the fuel storage compartment 206 to an outlet 210 of the torch's nozzle 108. In the illustrated embodiment, the fuel flow path 208 includes a fuel communication line 230 that provides for fluid communication between the pressurized fuel storage compartment 206 and the torch assembly 106. The illustrated fuel communication line 230 extends through the housing 228 of the fuel storage compartment 206 and mates with a fuel inlet port 232 on the torch assembly 106.

Within the torch assembly 106, a coupling tube 234 extends from the fuel inlet port 232 to the valve 212 and provides for fluid communication therebetween. The valve 212 is adapted to control the flow of fuel through the fuel flow path 208.

The illustrated valve 212 includes a valve body 214 and a plunger 216 that can move through the valve body 214 to control fuel flow through the valve 212 and, therefore, through the fuel flow path 208. The valve body 214 is positioned inside a valve nest 215 that is positioned within the housing 110. The valve body 214 forms portions of the fuel flow path 208 including a fuel inlet passage 236, a first cylindrical cavity 240, a second cylindrical cavity 238 and a fuel outlet passage 242. The illustrated valve body 214 also includes a rear cylindrical portion 245 that is securely fastened to a spring retention element 246. The outer surface of the rear cylindrical portion 245 has screw threads that engage a corresponding set of screw threads formed on an inner surface of the valve nest 215. In some implementations, the spring retention element 246 is press fit into the valve body 214 so that the spring retention element 246 and the valve body 214 can move axially together through the housing 110. Together, the rear cylindrical portion 245 and the spring retention element 246 contain a plunger spring 226.

The illustrated coupling tube 234 is in fluid communication with the valve's 212 fuel inlet passage 236, which extends radially inward through the valve body 214. A pair of o-rings 251 is provided between the valve body 214 and the valve nest 215 at opposite axial sides of the valve's 212 fuel inlet passage 236. Those o-rings 251 help prevent leakage from the fuel inlet passage 236 around the valve body 214. The o-rings 251 are coupled to grooves formed in an outer surface of the valve body 214 and are able to move axially through the valve nest 215 with the valve body 214.

The first cylindrical cavity 240 extends axially through the valve body 214 from the fuel inlet passage 236 to the second cylindrical cavity 238. The plunger 216 is adapted to move axially through the first cylindrical cavity 240. Fuel flow through the valve body 214 depends on the plunger's 216 position within the first cylindrical cavity 240. In one position (e.g., the position shown in FIG. 2A), the plunger 216 blocks fuel flow from the first cylindrical cavity 240 to the second cylindrical cavity 238. In another position (e.g., the position shown in FIG. 2B), the plunger 216 allows fuel flow from the first cylindrical cavity 240 to the second cylindrical cavity 238.

The second cylindrical cavity 238 extends in an axial direction from the first cylindrical cavity 240 and is in fluid communication therewith. The second cylindrical cavity 238 has

a narrower inner diameter than the first cylindrical cavity **240**. The second cylindrical cavity **238** is too narrow to accommodate the plunger **216**.

The fuel outlet passage **242** extends radially outward from the second cylindrical cavity **238** to a plenum **244**, which also forms part of the fuel flow path **208**. The plenum **244** is a space between the valve body **214** and the valve nest **215** and is near a forward end of the valve body **214**.

The forward tip **247** of the valve body **214** forms a slightly tapered cylindrical extension **248** that extends at least partially into a corresponding slightly tapered or cylindrical opening **250** in the valve nest **215** and is movable therein in an axial direction. The space provided between the cylindrical extension **248** and the slightly tapered cylindrical or opening **250** forms part of the fuel flow path **208**. The rate of fuel flow through that space depends on the amount of clearance that exists between the slightly tapered cylindrical extension **248** and the slightly tapered or cylindrical opening **250**. In general, a smaller clearance results in a lower fuel flow rate while a larger clearance results in a greater fuel flow rate. That clearance can be adjusted by moving the valve body **214** in an axial direction relative to the valve nest **215**. In the illustrated embodiment, if the valve body **214** is moved forward relative to the valve nest **215**, the clearance becomes smaller and the fuel flow rate is reduced. Alternately, if the valve body **214** is moved rearward relative to the valve nest **215**, the clearance becomes larger and the fuel flow rate increases.

In the illustrated embodiment, the amount of clearance between the slightly tapered cylindrical extension **248** and the slightly tapered cylindrical opening **250** can be adjusted by manipulating the flame adjuster lever **117**. The flame adjuster lever **117** is rigidly coupled to an annular flame adjuster interface **252** in such a manner that movement of the lever **117** causes the flame adjuster interface **252** to rotate about axis "b". The flame adjuster interface **252** has an axial, serrated opening that receives the spring retention element **246**. The serrations on the inner surface of the flame adjuster interface **252** engage corresponding serrations on an outer surface of the spring retention element **246**. Accordingly, rotation of the flame adjuster interface **252** causes similar rotation of the spring retention element **246**. Since the spring retention element **246** is rigidly coupled to the valve body **214** (e.g., by a press fit), the valve body **214** also rotates with the spring retention element. The rear cylindrical portion **245** of the valve body **214** is screwed into the valve nest **215**. Therefore, the valve body moves axially relative to the valve nest **215** as it rotates. Since the spring retention element **246** is rigidly coupled to the valve body **214**, the spring retention element also moves axially relative to the valve nest **215**. As discussed herein, moving the valve body **214** axially through the valve nest **215** changes the intensity of the flame being produced at the outlet **210** of nozzle **108**.

The illustrated fuel flow path **208** continues from the space between the slightly tapered cylindrical extension **248** at the forward tip **247** of the valve body **214** and the slightly tapered cylindrical opening **250** in the valve nest **215** to a compartment **254** that feeds into the nozzle **108**. The fuel flow path **208** continues through the nozzle **108** to the outlet **210** of the nozzle **108**.

The flame initiating assembly **202** also includes the trigger **112** that is operable to create a flame at the outlet **210** of nozzle **108**. The flame is created by establishing fuel flow through the fuel flow path **208** and by igniting the flowing fuel.

Actuation of the trigger **112** initiates fuel flow by moving the plunger **216** to a position (FIG. 2B) that allows fuel to flow through the fuel flow path **208**. The trigger **112** is able to

accomplish that because it is coupled to the plunger **216** by virtue of coupling element **256**. The illustrated coupling element **256** extends from the trigger **112** to the plunger **216** and has an opening, through which the plunger **216** passes and through which the plunger **216** can freely move in an axial direction. In some embodiments, the opening is a cylindrical passage through the coupling element **256**. In other implementations, the opening is a U-shaped cutout in the coupling element **256**. The opening can be any other convenient shape or configuration.

The coupling element **256** is adapted to move with the trigger **112**, so that when a user squeezes the trigger **112**, the coupling element **256** moves toward a trigger engagement portion **258** that is securely coupled to a rear portion of the plunger **216**. The trigger engagement portion **258** is positioned relative to the coupling element **256** such that, when the trigger **112** is fully squeezed, the coupling element **256** contacts the trigger engagement portion **258** and causes the trigger engagement portion **258** (and, therefore, the plunger **216**) to move axially rearward an amount sufficient to at least partially establish fuel flow from the first cylindrical cavity **240** of the valve **212** to the second cylindrical cavity **238**.

The flame initiating assembly **202** also includes the plunger **216**, which has a shaft **260**, a rubber seal **262** coupled to a forward end of the shaft **260**, a collar **264** for mating with plunger spring **226** to spring-load the plunger **216**. The coupling element **256** is operatively coupled to the shaft **260**. The continuous-flame mode engagement portion **222** is coupled to the shaft **260** at a rear end thereof. Fastening elements **266** hold the trigger engagement portion **258** and the continuous-flame mode engagement portion **222** in place. The illustrated fastening elements include a nut **268** and a lock washer **271**. However, other fastening elements could be used as well.

The illustrated embodiment shows the continuous-flame mode engagement portion **222** and the trigger engagement portion **258** formed as a distinct piece that is fit over the end of the plunger shaft **260**. However, in other embodiments, the continuous-flame mode engagement portion and trigger engagement portion **258** are integrally formed (e.g., by integral casting, welding, etc.) with the plunger shaft **260**. The illustrated continuous-flame mode engagement portion **222** and trigger engagement portion **258** have openings that extend in an axial direction, through which the plunger shaft **260** passes in an axial direction.

Operationally, squeezing the trigger **112** results in initiating a flame at the outlet **210** of the nozzle. Once initiated, the flame can be maintained by keeping the trigger **112** squeezed. However, if the trigger **112** is released without activating the continuous-flame mode, the flame is extinguished. If, the button **114** is pressed and released while a flame is being produced, then the torch enters the continuous-flame mode and the flame will be maintained even if the trigger **112** is subsequently released. If the torch is operating in continuous-flame mode, that mode can be deactivated by pressing and releasing the button **114** again. Deactivation of the continuous-flame mode extinguishes the flame. Each of those operating modes is discussed in more detail below.

When the trigger **112** is squeezed, the trigger **112** moves from the position shown in FIG. 2A to the position shown in FIG. 2B. When the trigger **112** moves in that manner, the coupling element **256** also moves. More particularly, the coupling element **256** moves axially rearward to contact the trigger engagement portion **258** on the plunger **216**. Once contact is established, further rearward movement of the coupling element **256** causes the trigger engagement portion **258** and the plunger **216** to move axially rearward in the torch assembly **106**. Eventually, the plunger **216** moves a sufficient

amount to unblock the fuel inlet passage 236 of the valve 212 and allow fuel to begin flowing through the fuel flow path 208.

Squeezing the trigger 112 to move it from the position shown in FIG. 2A to the position shown in FIG. 2B also causes the igniter 218 to create an ignition spark. That ignition spark ignites the fuel that is flowing through the outlet 210 of the nozzle 108.

Once a flame is established at the outlet 210 of the nozzle 108, if the trigger 112 is held in a squeezed position (FIG. 2B), then the coupling element 256 keeps the plunger 216 in an open position (FIG. 2B) allowing fuel flow through the fuel flow path 208. Accordingly, a flame is maintained at the outlet 210. However, if continuous-flame mode has not been activated and the trigger 112 is released, the trigger 112 and the plunger 216 return to their respective positions shown in FIG. 2A. The plunger 216 moves under force from plunger spring 226 and the trigger 112 moves under force from a trigger spring (not shown in the illustrated embodiment). The plunger 216, therefore, terminates fuel flow through the fuel flow path 208 by blocking the second cylindrical cavity 238 of the valve 212.

If the button 114 is pressed when the plunger 216 is in an open position (FIG. 2B), the latching mechanism 220 moves toward the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222 on the plunger 216. Eventually, the distal ends 306 of the flexible claws 304 contact a portion of the angled surface 227. Once that contact is established, further movement of the flexible claws 304 in the same direction causes the distal ends 306 to move along the angled surface 227 to portions thereof having an increasingly larger diameter. To accommodate the increasing diameter of the angled surface 227, the flexible claws 304 flex outwardly. Once the flexible claws 304 move forward an amount that is sufficient to allow the distal ends to flex past the step formed by the forward end of the lip 225 and the trigger engagement portion 258, the flexible claws 304 flex inwardly, thereby gripping and engaging the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222 and placing the torch assembly 106 into a continuous-flame operating mode.

Once the continuous-flame operating mode has been activated, the trigger 112 can be released without extinguishing the flame at the outlet 210. That is because the flexible claws 304 of the latching mechanism 220 hold the plunger 216 in the open position (FIG. 2B).

To deactivate the continuous-flame mode, the flexible claws 304 can be disengaged from the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222. To accomplish that, a user can once again press the button 114. That causes the flexible claws 304 to move axially forward and, eventually, contact the fixed element 224. Once contact is established, further movement of the flexible claws in the same direction causes the flexible claws 304 to flex outwardly to a point where the distal ends 306 of the flexible claws 304 clear the widest section (i.e., the step) of the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222. Once the widest section is cleared, the plunger 216 is free to move under the force from plunger spring 226 to a closed position (FIG. 2A) preventing fuel flow through the fuel flow path 208 and extinguishing the flame.

The flame adjuster lever 117 can be moved anytime to adjust the rate of fuel flow that can pass through the fuel flow path 208. Rate of fuel flow determines the intensity of the flame that can be created at the outlet 210. Moving the flame adjuster lever 117 adjusts the clearance between the slightly tapered cylindrical extension 248 and the corresponding slightly tapered cylindrical opening 250 in the valve nest 215. More particularly, moving the flame adjuster lever 117 causes the valve body 214 to move axially through the valve nest 215. Moving the valve body 214 rearward (i.e., toward the

button 114) increases the clearance between the slightly tapered cylindrical extension 248 and the corresponding slightly tapered cylindrical opening 250 and, therefore, increases the intensity of the flame that can be produced.

Conversely, moving the valve body 214 forward (i.e., toward the nozzle 108) increases the clearance between the slightly tapered cylindrical extension 248 and the corresponding slightly tapered cylindrical opening 250 and, therefore, decreases the intensity of the flame that can be produced.

In some embodiments, the trigger 112 is child-resistant. That child resistance can be achieved by virtue of a spring (not visible in FIGS. 2A and 2B, but see 404 in FIG. 4) coupled to the trigger 112 in a manner that makes the torch 100 resist successful operation by young children. In a typical embodiment, the spring would be adapted to require at least eight pounds of force to operate the trigger 112. More preferably, the spring would be adapted to require at least ten pounds of force to operate the trigger 112. Other methods of making the trigger 112 child-resistant are possible.

FIG. 4 is a cutaway partial side-view of an alternative embodiment of a hand-held torch 400 that is capable of being operated in a continuous-flame mode.

The embodiment of FIG. 4 is very similar to the embodiment discussed above in connection with FIGS. 2A and 2B. However, the fixed element in FIG. 4 is a pair of pins 402 that extend from the torch's housing 110. The pins 402 are positioned so that the flexible claws 304 can contact them to disengage from the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222.

Also, the embodiment of FIG. 4 shows a spring 404 coupled to the trigger 112 in a manner that causes the trigger 112 to resist successful operation by a young child. In some embodiments, the spring 404 spring loads the trigger 112 so that successful operation requires application of at least eight pounds of force. In other embodiments, the spring 404 spring loads the trigger 112 so that successful operation requires application of at least ten pounds of force. More generally, the spring 404 is adapted to require applications of force that will render the trigger child-resistant, in accordance with applicable regulations.

FIG. 5A is a perspective view of the valve body 214 of FIGS. 2A and 2B. FIG. 5B is a cutaway side view of the valve body 214.

The valve body 214 includes a fuel inlet passage 236 that extends radially through the valve body 214 and opens into a first cylindrical cavity 240. A second cylindrical cavity 238 with a narrower diameter than the first cylindrical cavity 240 is connected to and axially aligned with the first cylindrical cavity 240. A fuel outlet passage 242 extends from the second cylindrical cavity 238 radially outward through the valve body 214. A rear cylindrical portion 245 also is connected to and axially aligned with the first cylindrical cavity 240. The rear cylindrical portion 245 extends from the first cylindrical cavity 240 in a direction that is opposite the second cylindrical cavity 238. The rear cylindrical portion forms a cavity 244 that has a larger diameter than both the first and second cylindrical cavities 240, 238. The outer surface of the rear cylindrical portion 245 is threaded.

A pair of grooves 502 is formed in an outer surface of the valve body 214. Those grooves 502 are adapted to receive o-rings (i.e., o-rings 251 in FIGS. 2A and 2B). The forward tip 247 of the valve body 214 forms a slightly tapered cylindrical extension 248.

FIGS. 6A and 6B are partial cutaway side-views of an alternative embodiment of a hand-held torch 600 that is capable of being operated in a continuous-flame mode by means of a latching mechanism as further illustrated in FIG.

11

7. In FIG. 6A, the torch assembly 106 is shown in an off state. In FIG. 6B, the torch assembly 106 is shown in an on state.

Referring to FIG. 7, the illustrated latching mechanism 219 includes a base element 602, a pair of claws 604, and spring 606. The base element 602 includes a pair of pivots 608, to which each claw 604 at one end thereof is connected and about which each claw 604 can rotate. The spring 606 is connected to each claw 604 and applies a force which causes the claws 604 to rotate towards each other about the pivots 608. In the illustrated embodiment, the spring 606 is a helical extension spring. However, in alternative embodiments the spring 606 may be comprised of other elements capable of providing a pivoting force to the claws 604. For example, the spring 606 may be a stretchable material, such as a rubber band, or the spring 606 may be a pair of torsion springs connected to the claws 604 and disposed around the pivots 608.

Each claw 604 of the latching mechanism 219 includes a stop 610 at one end thereof which is configured to engage the base element 602 and prevent the claws 604 from rotating towards each other beyond a predetermined angle. When the torch assembly 106 is off, as shown in FIG. 7, the spring 606 causes the stops 610 of the claws 604 to engage the base element 602 such that the claws 604 are angled slightly away from one another.

Similar to the claws 304 of the latching mechanism 220 of FIGS. 2A and 2B, the claws 604 of FIGS. 6A and 6B have distal ends 612 with tips that face approximately towards each other to facilitate engagement with gripping the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 on the plunger 216. The distal ends 612 of the claws 604 are configured to engage the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 in the same manner as the distal ends 306 of the claws 304 of FIGS. 2A and 2B. Any suitable design of the cooperating elements is contemplated.

The latching mechanism 219 is connected to the button 114 in the same manner as the latching mechanism 220 of FIGS. 2A and 2B. That is, the base element 602 is coupled to the stem 221 of the button 114 by a fastening element 253 which passes through a hole (not shown) in the base element 602. In an alternative embodiment (not shown) the base element 602 is integrally formed with the stem 221. In this later embodiment, the base element 602 does not include a hole and the fastening element 253 is not included.

The continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 operates in a similar manner as the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222 of FIGS. 2A and 2B, but it is configured differently. As illustrated in FIG. 7, the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 is formed as a single plate-like element which is formed to include a first portion 614 which extends perpendicularly away from the shaft 260 of the plunger 216 and then bends approximately 90° towards the latching mechanism 219. This first portion 614 forms the trigger engagement portion 258 as described above. The continuous-flame mode engagement portion then bends back approximately 90° and continues perpendicularly away from the shaft 260 before bending at a slight angle in a direction towards the nozzle 108 and coming to an end 618, thus forming the second portion. This second portion 616 forms the lip 225 with an angled surface 227 as described above. The continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 is coupled to the shaft 260 by fastening elements 266, as described above with respect to FIGS. 2A and 2B. It will be understood from the function of the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 that other designs are contemplated. It is only

12

required that the engagement portion 223 and claims 604 be cooperatively designed for releasable engagement with one another.

As illustrated in FIG. 7, the plate-like continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 has a generally rectangular shape when viewed along the axis of the shaft 260. Accordingly, to prevent rotation of the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223, which might cause it to become misaligned with the latching mechanism 219, a rib 620 extends from the torch's housing 110. The rib 620 is configured to contact the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 and permit it to move in a direction along the axis of the shaft 260, while preventing it from rotating around the axis. Similarly, ribs 622 extend from the housing 110 to prevent the latching mechanism 219 from rotating. Though the illustrated continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 has a rectangular shape, that element may have any shape. For example, the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 may have a circular shape when viewed along the axis of the shaft 260, in which case the rib 620 may not be required because rotation of a continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 having that shape will not cause it to become misaligned with the latching mechanism 219.

The interaction between the latching mechanism 219 and the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 is substantially the same as described above with respect to FIGS. 2A and 2B. In particular, if the button 114 is pressed when the plunger 216 is in an open position, the latching mechanism 219 moves towards the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 on the plunger. The distal ends 612 of the claws 604 contact a portion of the angled surface 227 and then move along the angled surface 227. This movement causes the claws 604 to rotate outwardly about the pivots 608 of the base element 602. Once the distal ends 612 of the claws 604 pass the ends 618 of the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223, the spring 606 causes the claws 604 to rotate inwardly, thereby gripping and engaging the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 and placing the torch assembly 106 into a continuous-flame operating mode. In this mode, as described above, the claws 604 of the latching mechanism 219 hold the plunger 216 in the open position (FIG. 6B). It is to be understood that the latching mechanism 219 is to be constructed as a single rotatable claw 604, which can be biased by a spring 606 to a fixed member such as one extending from or part of the base element 602.

Deactivation of the continuous-flame mode of the torch 600 is substantially the same as described above with respect to FIGS. 2A and 2B. In particular, when a user once again presses the button 114, the claws 604 move axially forward and contact a pair of pins 402 that extend from the torch's housing 110. Further movement in the same direction causes the claws 604 to rotate outwardly until the distal ends 612 of the claws 604 clear the ends 618 of the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223, which allows the plunger 216 to move under the force from the plunger spring 226 to a closed position (FIG. 6A).

Other alternative embodiments are illustrated by FIGS. 6A and 6B. For example, instead of the fuel storage compartment 206 illustrated in FIGS. 2A and 2B, one preferred embodiment may include a fuel transfer adaptor 624 configured to releasably attach to a fuel container, as disclosed in above referenced U.S. Pat. No. 6,959,742. The fuel flow path of that embodiment is substantially the same as described above with respect to the embodiment of FIGS. 2A and 2B. In particular, the coupling tube (not shown) provides for fluid communication between the attachable fuel container (not shown) and the fuel inlet passage 236. Instead of approaching the valve body

214 from below, however, the coupling tube of the illustrated embodiment directs the fuel flow into an inlet 626 through the valve nest 215 which is located above the valve body 214. From the inlet 626, the fuel is directed to the fuel inlet passage 236 through a plenum 628, which is created by the space bounded by the valve body 214, the valve nest 215, and the o-rings 251. Once inside the fuel inlet passage 236, the fuel follows the remainder of the fuel flow path 208 exactly as described above with respect to the embodiment of FIGS. 2A and 2B.

Another optional feature illustrated in FIGS. 6A and 6B is an evaporation tube 632, which is an extension of the fuel flow path 208. The evaporation tube 632 provides for fluid communication between the slightly tapered cylindrical opening 250 and the outlet 210 of the nozzle 108. Upon exiting the slightly tapered cylindrical opening 250, the fuel enters the inlet passage 634 of the evaporation tube 632. The evaporation tube 632 is shaped such that the fuel moving through it proceeds from the inlet passage 634 to the evaporation portion 636, which is located in the nozzle 108. Once in the evaporation portion 636, the fuel is heated because of its proximity to the flame being produced in the nozzle 108. This heating of the fuel ensures that any fuel which heretofore remained in a liquid state evaporates and becomes a gas before being ignited. The gaseous fuel then proceeds along the evaporation tube 632, which bends back away from the outlet 210 and exits the nozzle 108. The fuel then exits the evaporation tube 632 from the outlet passage 638 and proceeds to the nozzle 108 to be ignited.

Although the invention herein has been described with reference to particular embodiments, it is to be understood that these embodiments are merely illustrative of the principles and applications of the present invention. It is therefore to be understood that numerous modifications may be made to the illustrative embodiments and that other arrangements may be devised without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention as defined by the appended claims.

For example, the latching mechanism could be adapted to engage the plunger in a variety of other ways, for example, by using a tab to engage a slot, by utilizing other gripping means, etc. Additionally, other techniques may be used to prevent and/or allow fuel flow through the torch. For example, any number of simple valve configurations could be used. A variety of materials can be used to manufacture the structures disclosed herein, and a variety of methods can be utilized to secure those structures to each other.

Although specific actuating mechanisms have been described, there are a variety of suitable actuating mechanisms, e.g., switches, knobs, buttons, etc. that might be used instead of those specifically disclosed herein. Other techniques for igniting the fuel are possible and a variety of fuel types are possible.

Additionally, although two claws are shown, any number of claws (including only one) may be suitable for a particular embodiment. Moreover, the claws can be formed from flexible wires, tubes or other configurations. The claws can be metallic, plastic or any suitable material.

In some implementations, the torch housing 110 is split (i.e., it consists of two halves that are connected together after the torch internals have been assembled). The torch housing 110 may be formed in a number of other ways as well.

Additionally, further embodiments within the scope of the present invention may be created by combining elements from certain described embodiments with elements from other described embodiments. For example, any embodiment may include either the unitary latching mechanism 220 of FIGS. 2A and 2B or the latching mechanism 219 comprised

of a plurality of components as illustrated in FIGS. 6A and 6B, or equivalents thereof. Further, such embodiment may include either the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 222 illustrated in FIGS. 2A and 2B or the continuous-flame mode engagement portion 223 illustrated in FIGS. 6A and 6B, or equivalents thereof. Additionally, such embodiment may include either a fuel storage compartment 206 or a fuel transfer adaptor 624 configured to releasably attach to a fuel container. Any such embodiment may further include either the fixed element 224 illustrated in FIGS. 2A and 2B or the fixed element comprising a pair of pins 402, or equivalents thereof.

Moreover, the techniques and structures disclosed herein may be readily adapted to a variety of lighter and torch applications.

Accordingly, other embodiments are within the scope of the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A hand-held torch comprising:

- a housing;
- a fuel flow path defined within said housing;
- a plunger movable within said housing to control fuel flow through the fuel flow path;
- an engagement portion coupled to said plunger;
- a latching mechanism including at least one rotatable claw, the rotatable claw being movable between engaged and disengaged positions, the rotatable claw being disengaged from the engagement portion in the disengaged position, and the rotatable claw being engaged with the engagement portion in the engaged position, wherein the rotatable claw is movable from the disengaged position to the engaged position when the plunger is in a position allowing fuel flow through the fuel flow path; and
- a continuous-flame mode actuator coupled to the latching mechanism and exposed for manipulation by a user to move said at least one claw into the engaged position.

2. The hand-held torch of claim 1 wherein the latching mechanism includes a biasing element attached to said at least one claw to maintain said claw engaged with said engagement portion.

3. The hand-held torch of claim 1 wherein said latching mechanism comprises a pair of claws rotatably connected to a base element.

4. The hand held torch of claim 3 wherein the latching mechanism includes a spring coupled to said claws to maintain said claws engaged with said engagement portion.

5. The hand-held torch of claim 3 wherein each of said claws include a distal end that is configured to grip a portion of the engagement portion.

6. The hand-held torch of claim 1 wherein the engagement portion comprises:

- an angled surface exposed for contact with a portion of said at least one claw when said at least one claw is moved toward the engagement portion for engagement therewith.

7. The hand-held torch of claim 1 further comprising:

- a fixed element coupled to the housing and positioned adjacent to the latching mechanism, such that, when the latching mechanism is in engagement with the engagement portion and the actuator is manipulated, the latching mechanism contacts the fixed element and, thereby, disengages the latching mechanism from the engagement portion.

8. The hand-held torch of claim 1 further including a child-resistant flame actuator comprising:

15

a trigger coupled to the housing adapted for operation of the plunger; and
 a spring coupled to the trigger and arranged to resist actuation of the trigger.

9. The hand-held torch of claim 1 wherein the continuous-flame mode actuator comprises a button that can be moved in a direction that is in line with an axis of the plunger.

10. A hand-held torch comprising:

a housing;

a fuel flow path defined within said housing;

a plunger movable within said housing to control fuel flow through the fuel flow path;

an engagement portion coupled to said plunger;

a latching mechanism movable to engage the engagement portion when the plunger is in a position allowing fuel flow through the fuel flow path, the latching mechanism comprising a pair of claws rotatably coupled to a base element, such that each of the claws is independently rotatable about a pivot point with respect to the base element;

a continuous-flame mode actuator exposed for manipulation by a user to cause said pair of claws of said latching mechanism to engage the engagement portion

a fixed element coupled to the housing and positioned adjacent to the latching mechanism, such that, when the latching mechanism is in engagement with the engagement portion and the actuator is manipulated, the latching mechanism contacts the fixed element and, thereby, disengages the latching mechanism from the engagement portion.

11. The hand-held torch of claim 10 wherein the engagement portion comprises a plate-like element having a generally rectangular footprint when viewed along a longitudinal axis of the plunger.

12. The hand held torch of claim 10 wherein the latching mechanism includes a spring coupled between said claws to maintain said claws engaged with said engagement portion.

13. The hand-held torch of claim 10 wherein each claw includes a distal end that is configured to grip a portion of the engagement portion.

14. The hand-held torch of claim 13 wherein the engagement portion comprises:

an angled surface exposed for contact with said claws when said claws are moved toward the engagement portion for engagement therewith.

15. The hand-held torch of claim 10 wherein the fixed element comprises at least one pin that extends from the housing.

16. The hand-held torch of claim 10 wherein the continuous-flame mode actuator comprises a button that can be moved in a direction that is in line with an axis of the plunger.

17. The hand-held torch of claim 10 further comprising a child-resistant flame actuator coupled to the housing and exposed for manipulation by a user to move the plunger.

18. The hand-held torch of claim 10 wherein the pivot points are connected to the base element.

19. A continuous-flame mode assembly for facilitating a continuous-flame mode of a hand-held torch having a fluid flow control plunger, comprising:

an engagement portion coupled to the plunger;

a latching mechanism including at least one rotatable claw, the rotatable claw being movable between engaged and disengaged positions, the rotatable claw being disengaged from the engagement portion in the disengaged position, and the rotatable claw being engaged with the engagement portion in the engaged position, wherein

16

the rotatable claw is movable to the engaged position, thereby activating the continuous-flame mode; and
 a continuous-flame mode actuator coupled to the latching mechanism and exposed for manipulation by a user to move said claw into the engaged position, thereby maintaining the continuous-flame mode.

20. The continuous-flame mode assembly of claim 19 wherein the engagement portion comprises a rectangular plate.

21. The continuous-flame mode assembly of claim 19 wherein said latching mechanism comprises a pair of claws rotatably connected to a base element.

22. The continuous-flame mode assembly of claim 21 wherein the latching mechanism includes a spring coupled to said claws to maintain said claws engaged with said engagement portion.

23. The continuous-flame mode assembly of claim 21 wherein each of said claws include a distal end that is configured to grip a portion of the engagement portion.

24. The continuous-flame mode assembly of claim 23 wherein the engagement portion comprises:

an angled surface exposed for contact with a portion of said at least one claw when said at least one claw is moved toward the engagement portion for engagement therewith.

25. The continuous-flame mode assembly of claim 18 further comprising:

a fixed element positioned adjacent to the latching mechanism, such that, when the latching mechanism is in engagement with the engagement portion and the actuator is manipulated, the latching mechanism contacts the fixed element and, thereby, disengages the latching mechanism from the engagement portion.

26. A method of operating a hand-held, continuous-flame mode torch, the method comprising:

moving a plunger in the torch to an open position to establish fuel flow through a fuel flow path in the torch;

igniting the flowing fuel to create a flame at an outlet of the fuel flow path; and

with the plunger in the open position, moving a latching mechanism having a pair of rotatable claws from a disengaged position to an engaged position to maintain the plunger in the open position whereby fuel flow is maintained through the fuel flow path, wherein the latching mechanism is disengaged from an engagement portion on the plunger in the disengaged position, and wherein the latching mechanism is engaged with the engagement portion in the engaged position.

27. A hand-held torch comprising:

a housing;

a fuel flow path defined within said housing;

a plunger movable within said housing to control fuel flow through the fuel flow path;

an engagement portion coupled to said plunger;

a latching mechanism including at least one rotatable claw movable to engage the engagement portion when the plunger is in a position allowing fuel flow through the fuel flow path;

a continuous-flame mode actuator coupled to the latching mechanism and exposed for manipulation by a user to move said at least one claw into engagement with the engagement portion; and

a fixed element coupled to the housing and positioned adjacent to the latching mechanism, such that, when the latching mechanism is in engagement with the engagement portion and the actuator is manipulated, the latch-

17

ing mechanism contacts the fixed element and, thereby, disengages the latching mechanism from the engagement portion.

28. The hand-held torch of claim **27** wherein the fixed element comprises at least one pin that extends from the housing. 5

29. A hand-held torch comprising:

a housing;

a fuel flow path defined within said housing;

a plunger having a longitudinal axis, the plunger being movable within said housing to control fuel flow through the fuel flow path; 10

18

an engagement portion coupled to said plunger;

a latching mechanism including at least one rotatable claw movable to engage the engagement portion when the plunger is in a position allowing fuel flow through the fuel flow path; and

a continuous-flame mode actuator coupled to the latching mechanism and exposed for manipulation by a user to move said at least one claw into engagement with the engagement portion, the continuous-flame mode actuator comprising a button that can be moved in a direction that is in line with the longitudinal axis of the plunger.

* * * * *

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO. : 7,699,601 B2
APPLICATION NO. : 11/974194
DATED : April 20, 2010
INVENTOR(S) : Aronson, II et al.

Page 1 of 1

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

Column 2, line 35, delete the first occurrence of the word "and".

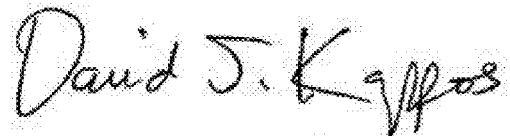
Column 2, line 37, delete "element" and insert -- mechanism --.

Column 10, line 55, delete "244" and insert -- 243 --.

Column 12, line 1, delete "claims" and insert -- claws --.

Column 16, line 26, delete "18" and insert -- 19 --.

Signed and Sealed this
Nineteenth Day of April, 2011

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David J. Kappos". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and "K".

David J. Kappos
Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office