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(54) **HELICAL TUBE BUNDLE ARRANGEMENTS FOR HEAT EXCHANGERS**

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(75) Inventors: **Nicholas J. Nagurny**, Manassas, VA (US); **Natalie B. Levings**, Palm Beach Gardens, FL (US); **Derek M. Beckner**, Herndon, VA (US); **Scott M. Maurer**, Haymarket, VA (US)

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A heat exchanger comprising helically wound tube bundles is disclosed. The helically wound tube bundles are joined with tube sheets to define a primary working fluid system that is fluidically isolated from a secondary working fluid system. The tube sheets and tubes are formed of the same material, which facilitates their joining by means of joints that are substantially galvanic corrosion-resistant joints.

Correspondence Address:
Lockheed Martin c/o
DEMONT & BREYER, LLC
100 COMMONS WAY, Ste. 250
HOLMDEL, NJ 07733 (US)

(73) Assignee: **LOCKHEED MARTIN CORPORATION**, Bethesda, MD (US)

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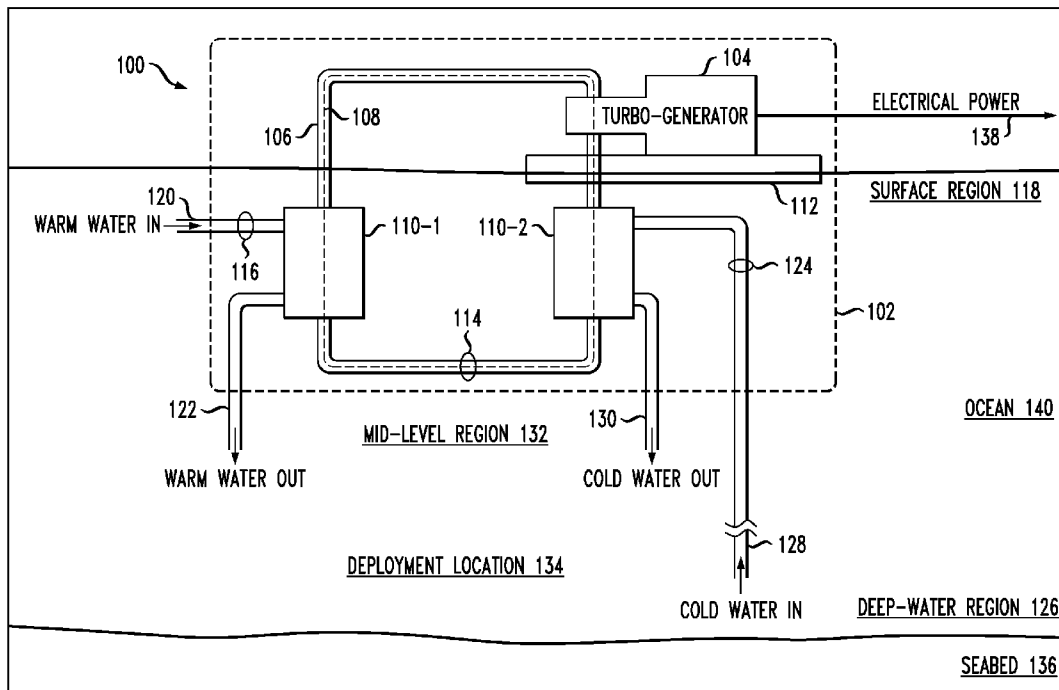


FIG. 1

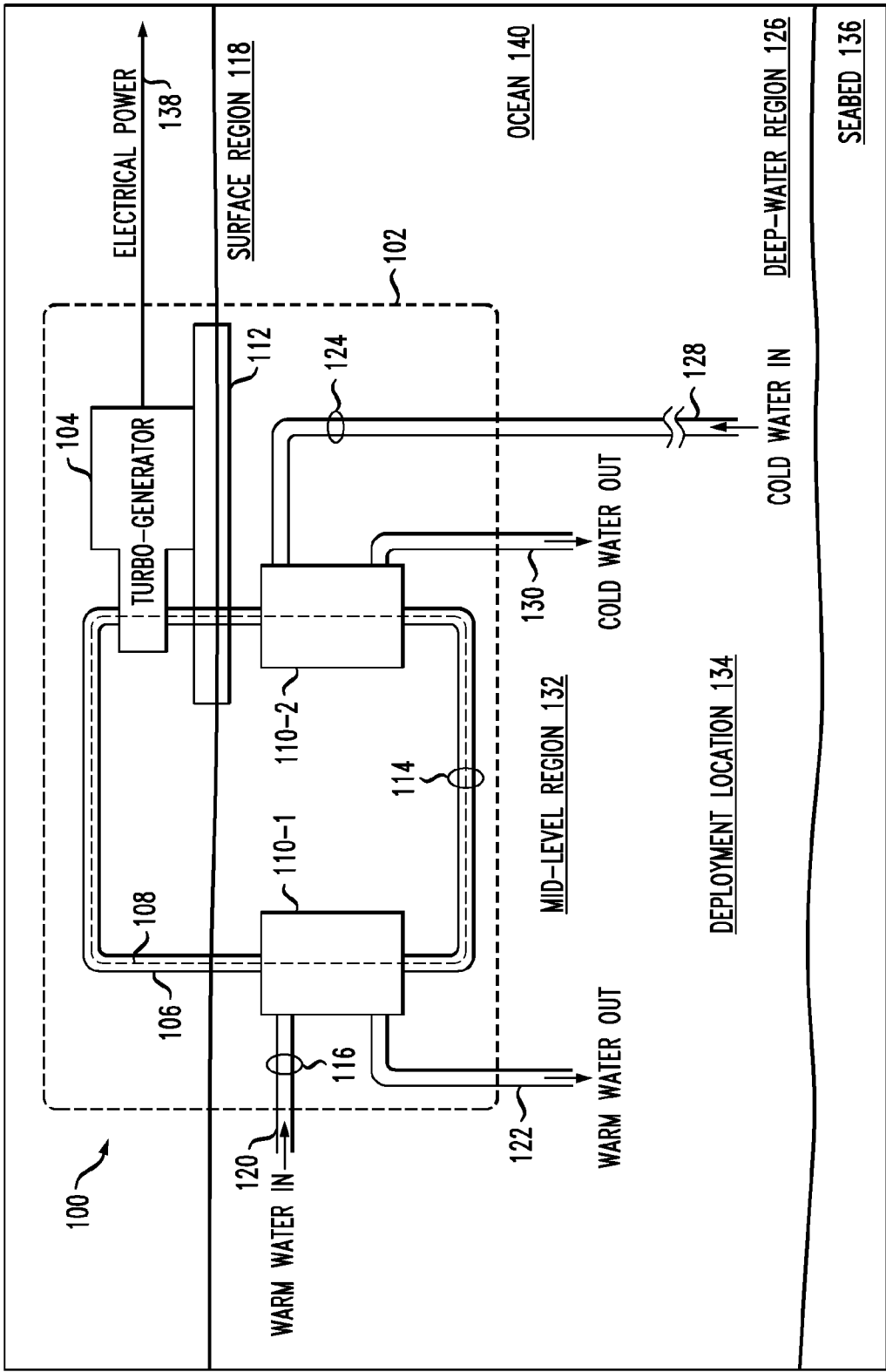


FIG. 2

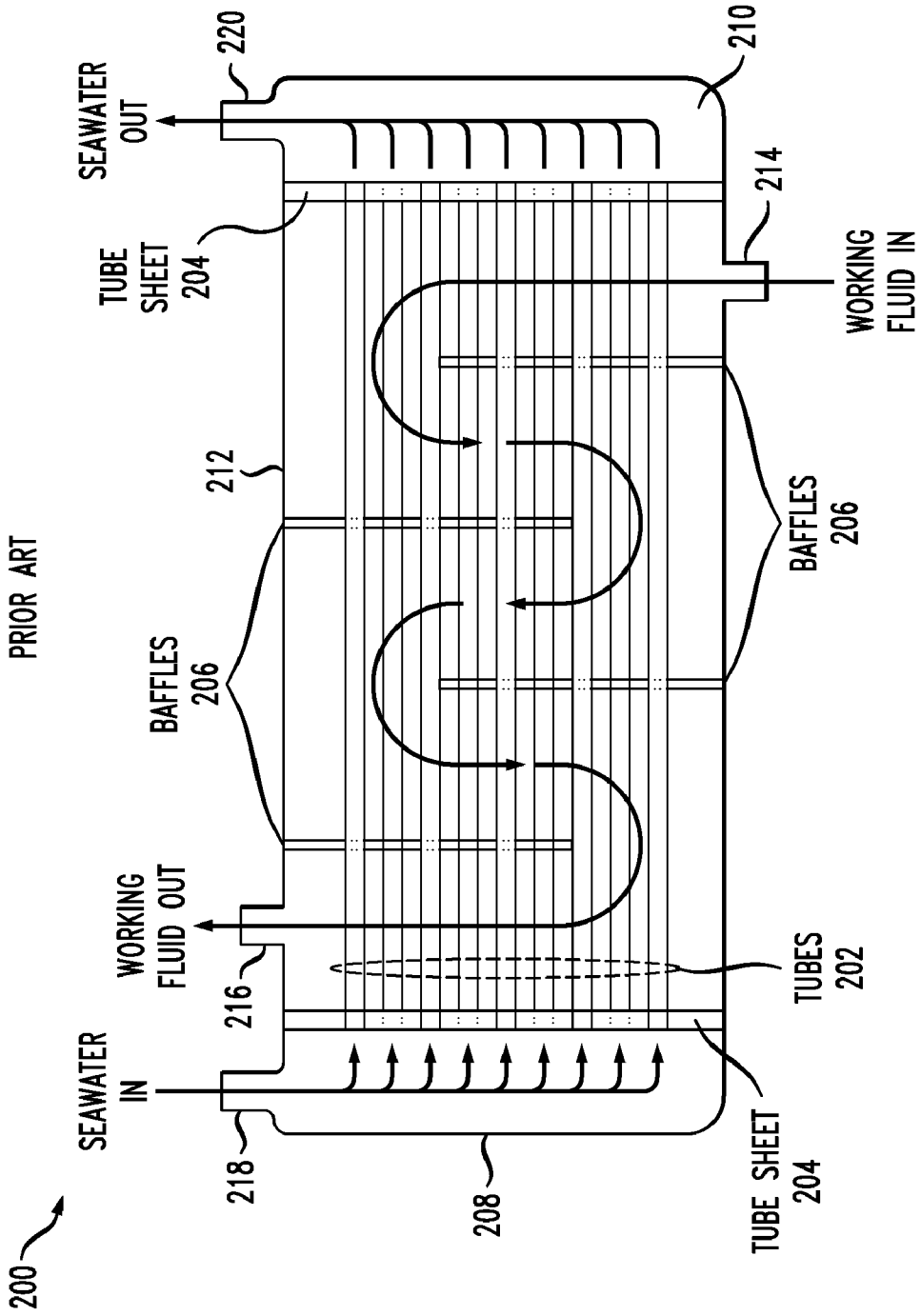


FIG. 3A

PRIOR ART

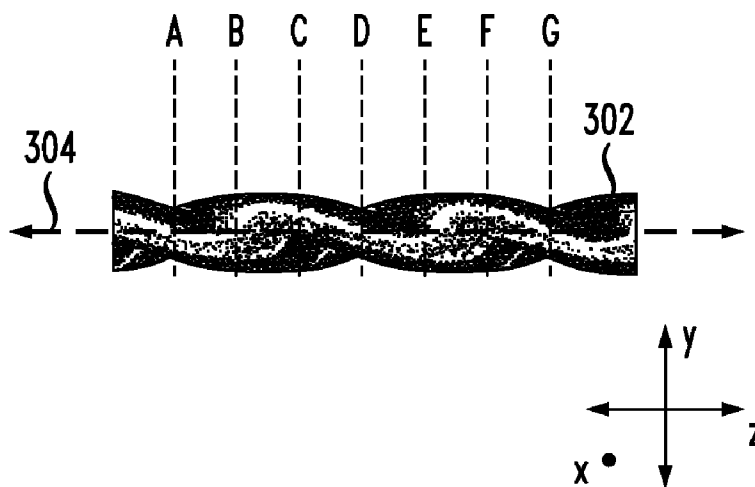


FIG. 3B

PRIOR ART

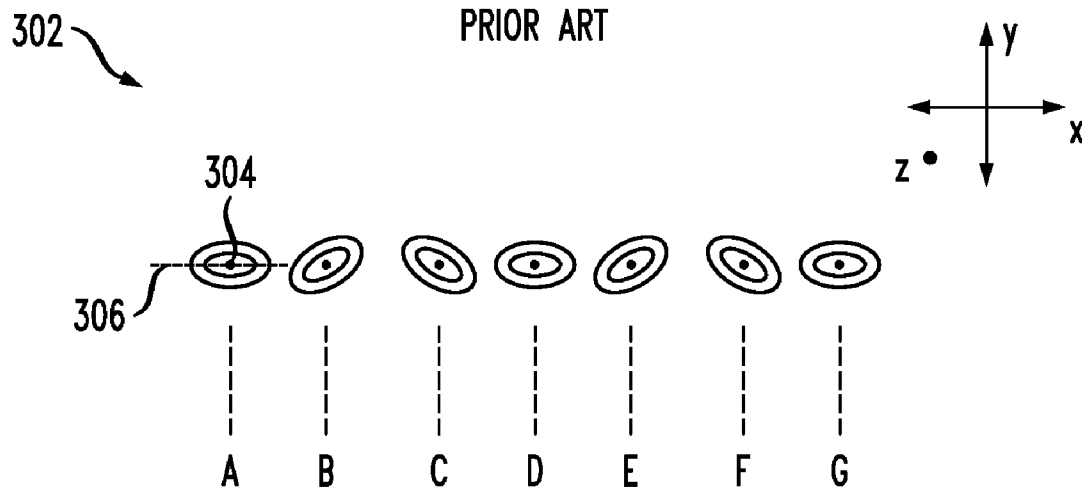


FIG. 4

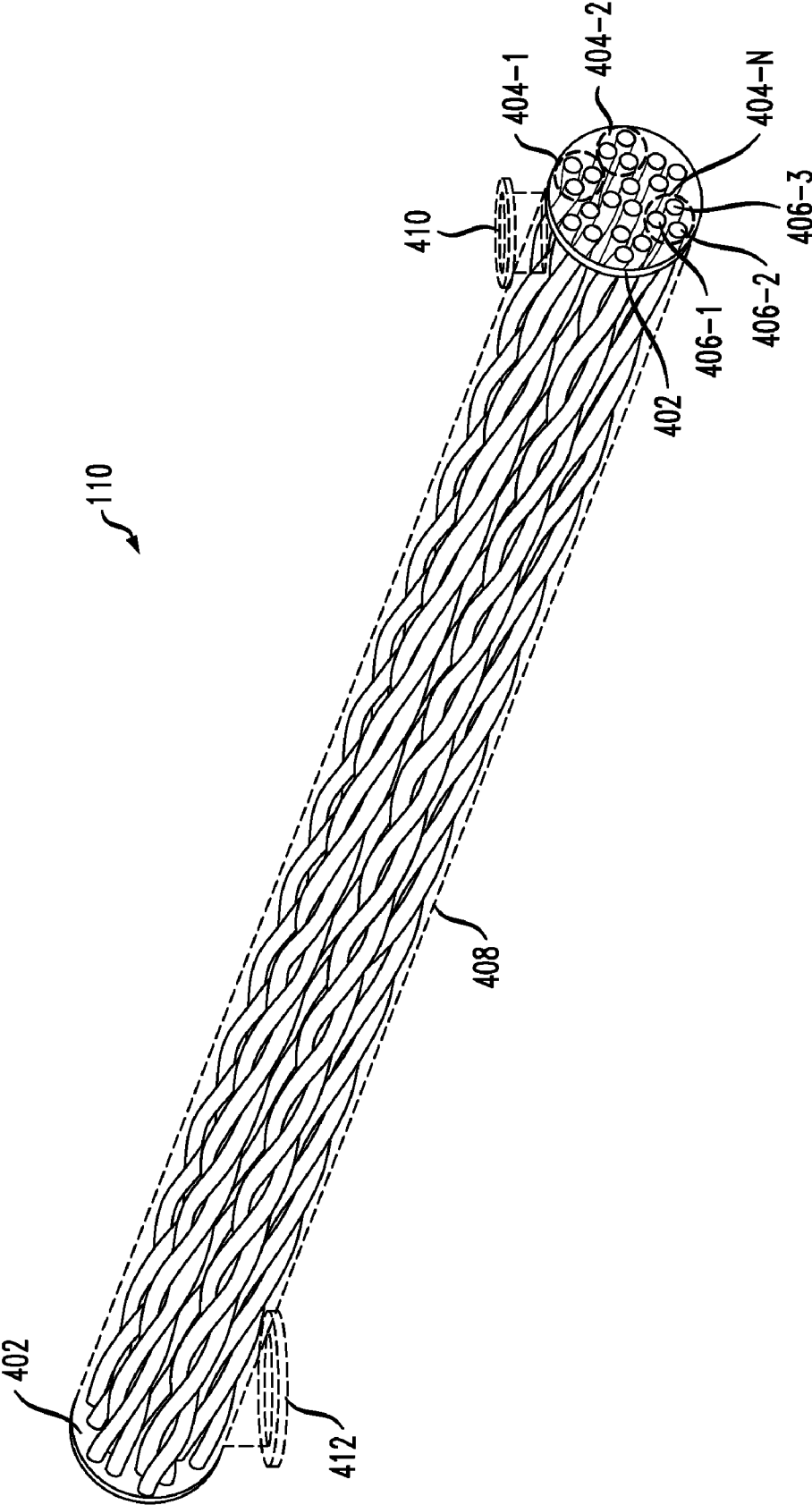


FIG. 5A

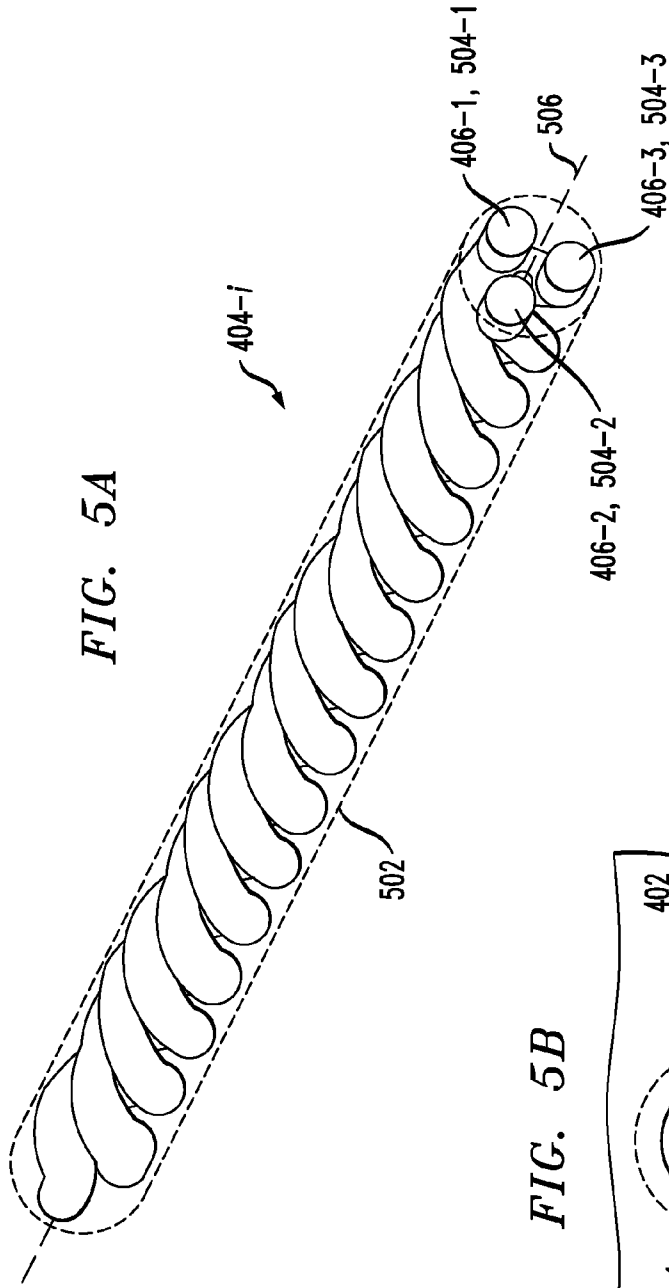
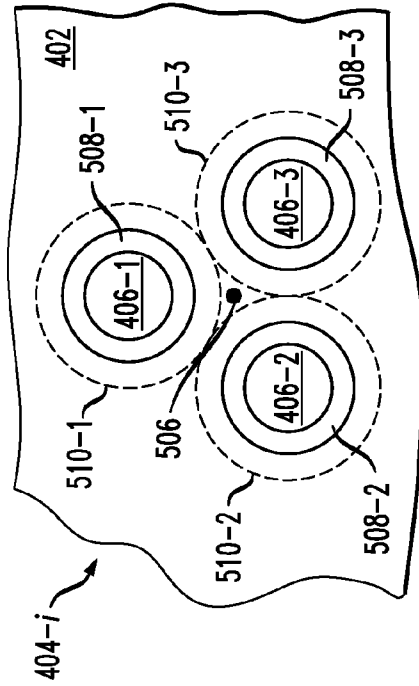
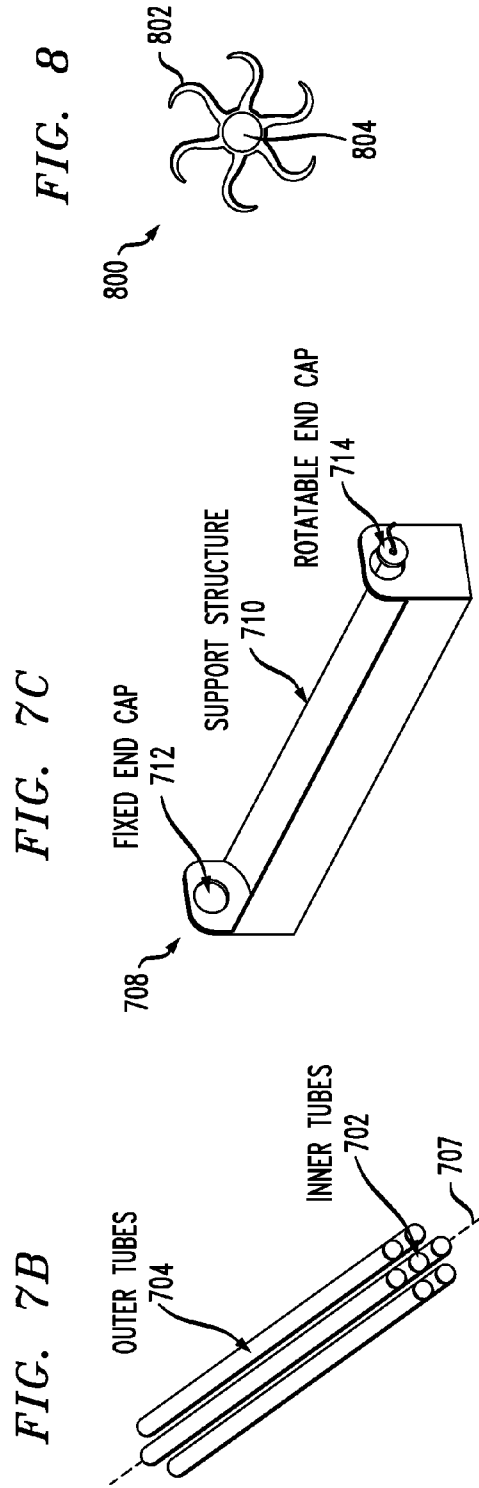
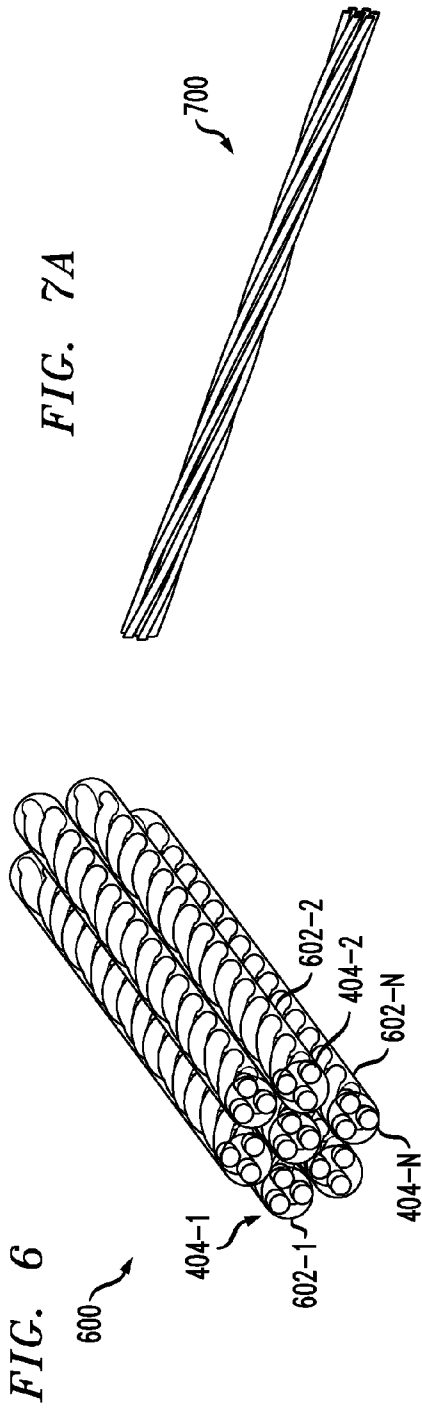


FIG. 5B





HELICAL TUBE BUNDLE ARRANGEMENTS FOR HEAT EXCHANGERS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] moon This case claims priority of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 61/225,991, which was filed Jul. 16, 2009 (Attorney Docket: 711-283US), and which is incorporated herein by reference.

[0002] If there are any contradictions or inconsistencies in language between this application and one or more of the cases that have been incorporated by reference that might affect the interpretation of the claims in this case, the claims in this case should be interpreted to be consistent with the language in this case.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The present invention relates to heat exchangers in general, and, more particularly, to shell-and-tube heat exchangers.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0004] Ocean thermal energy conversion (“OTEC”) is a method for generating electricity based on the temperature difference that exists between deep and shallow waters of a large body of water, such as an ocean, sea, gulf, or large, deep lake. An OTEC system utilizes a heat engine (i.e., a thermodynamic device or system that generates electricity based on a temperature differential) that is thermally coupled between relatively warmer shallow and relatively colder deep water.

[0005] One heat engine suitable for OTEC is based on the Rankine cycle, which uses a low-pressure turbine. A closed-loop conduit containing a fluid characterized by a low boiling point, such as ammonia, is thermally coupled with warm water at a first heat exchanger where the low-boiling-point fluid is vaporized. The expanding vapor is forced through the turbine, which drives a turbo-generator. After exiting the turbine, the vaporized working fluid is condensed back into a liquid state at a second heat exchanger where the closed-loop conduit is thermally coupled with cold water. The condensed working fluid is then recycled through the system.

[0006] OTEC systems have been shown to be technically viable, but the high capital cost of these systems has thwarted commercialization. The heat exchangers are the second largest contributor to OTEC plant capital cost (the largest is the cost of the offshore moored vessel or platform). The optimization of the enormous heat exchangers that are required for an OTEC plant is therefore of great importance and can have a major impact on the economic viability of OTEC technology.

[0007] Many types of heat exchangers have been employed in OTEC systems including; plate-fin, plate-frame, and shell-and-tube heat exchangers. Shell-and-tube heat exchangers are particularly attractive for use in OTEC applications because of their potential for large volume fluid flow and low back pressure. A shell-and-tube heat exchanger comprises multiple tubes placed between two tube sheets and encapsulated in a pressure-vessel shell. A first fluid or gas is passed through the tubes and a second fluid or gas is passed through the pressure-vessel shell such that it flows along the outer surface of the tubes. Heat energy is transferred between the first fluid and second fluid through the walls of the tubes. The tube ends are typically press fit or welded into the tube sheets.

[0008] Unfortunately, shell-and-tube heat exchangers have several drawbacks that have thus-far limited their use in marine applications. First, the overall heat transfer coefficient, U, that is associated with reasonable pressure drops for OTEC is typically below 2000 W/m²K. Heat transfer efficiency is limited by, among other things (1) baffles that are typically included in the pressure-vessel to induce turbulence and transverse flow of the second fluid, and (2) a limitation on the flow rate of the second fluid to avoid inducing vibration and flow forces that induce mechanical stresses and strains on the tubes.

[0009] A second drawback of conventional shell-and-tube heat exchangers is that they are prone to “bio-fouling.” Bio-fouling decreases efficiency and leads to increased maintenance costs (particularly for heat exchangers located at deep-water levels). Bio-fouling arises from, among other things, trapping of organic matter in voids and crevices, such as those associated with tubes that are press fit or fusion-welded into tube sheets.

[0010] A third drawback of conventional shell-and-tube heat exchangers is that they are not well-suited to seawater applications, such as OTEC. Since the tubes are press fit or fusion-welded into the tube sheets, it is difficult to ensure fluidic isolation between the primary fluid inside the tubes and seawater flowing around the tubes through the shell. Further, the reliability of conventional shell-and-tube heat exchangers is compromised by galvanic corrosion that occurs at the welded joints used to seal the tubes to the tube sheets. Galvanic corrosion occurs due to reactivity between dissimilar metals included in fusion welds. Galvanic corrosion is exacerbated by exposure of the welds to seawater. Reliability is degraded further by the potential for crevice corrosion in regions of stagnant flow even for shell-and-tube designs customized for OTEC applications.

[0011] Historically, these drawbacks have driven the size and cost for shell-and-tube heat exchangers too high for practical consideration.

[0012] With today’s growing need for energy, using a renewable, constant, baseload power source is a desirable solution. As a consequence, there is a renewed interest in OTEC power plants. But development of a low-cost OTEC heat exchanger having high heat-exchange capacity, high flow rates, low pumping parasitic losses, and long life in the ocean environment remains elusive.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0013] The present invention provides a heat exchanger without some of the costs and disadvantages of the prior art. Embodiments of the present invention are particularly well-suited for use in OTEC systems; however, embodiments in accordance with the present invention are also suited for use in other heat exchanger applications, such as nuclear reactors, chemical plants, and the like.

[0014] The illustrative embodiment of the present invention is a shell-and-tube heat exchanger wherein the tubes are arranged as a plurality of tube bundles, each of which includes a plurality of tubes for conveying a primary or secondary fluid. Each tube bundle is characterized by a central axis that extends from a first tube sheet to a second tube sheet, and each tube bundle is helically wound about its central axis.

[0015] In some embodiments, the tube sheets and the tubes are made of the same material and friction-stir welding is used to join the tube walls to the tube sheets. As a result, the tube walls and tube sheets form substantially galvanic corrosion-

resistant joints that seal and isolate the fluid in the tubes from a fluid that flows around the tubes in the shell.

[0016] In some embodiments, the plurality of tube bundles is arranged at each tube sheet in a hexagonally close-packed arrangement.

[0017] In some embodiments, the tubes within each tube bundle are mechanically coupled to restrict the motion of each tube relative to the other tubes within its tube bundle. In some embodiments, the tubes within each tube bundle are mechanically coupled to substantially disallow any motion of each tube relative to the other tubes within each tube bundle.

[0018] In some embodiments, a first tube bundle is enclosed in a first shroud that conveys a first fluid and a second tube bundle is enclosed in a second shroud that conveys a second fluid that is different from the first fluid as well as the fluid flowing through the tubes themselves.

[0019] An embodiment of the present invention comprises: a heat exchanger comprising a first tube bundle having a first central axis, wherein the first tube bundle comprises a first plurality of tubes for conveying a first fluid, and wherein the first tube bundle is helically wound about the first central axis.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0020] FIG. 1 depicts a schematic diagram of an OTEC power generation system in accordance with an illustrative embodiment of the present invention.

[0021] FIG. 2 depicts a conventional shell-and-tube heat exchanger as is known in the prior art.

[0022] FIG. 3A depicts a twisted tube suitable for use in a shell-and-tube heat exchanger in accordance with the prior art.

[0023] FIG. 3B depicts a series of cross-section views of tube 302 at different points along the z-direction.

[0024] FIG. 4 depicts a shell-and-tube heat exchanger in accordance with an illustrative embodiment of the present invention.

[0025] FIG. 5A depicts a tube bundle in accordance with the illustrative embodiment of the present invention.

[0026] FIG. 5B depicts an end-view of tube bundle 404-*i* in accordance with the illustrative embodiment of the present invention.

[0027] FIG. 6 depicts an arrangement of tube bundles in accordance with a first alternative embodiment of the present invention.

[0028] FIG. 7A depicts a tube bundle in accordance with a second alternative embodiment of the present invention.

[0029] FIG. 7B depicts tube bundle 700 prior to the winding of outer tubes 704 about center tube 702.

[0030] FIG. 7C depicts bundle assembly mechanism for forming a tube bundle in accordance with the second alternative embodiment of the present invention.

[0031] FIG. 8 depicts a guide for holding outer tubes 704 and center tube 702 during and/or after formation of tube bundle 700.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0032] FIG. 1 depicts a schematic diagram of an OTEC power generation system in accordance with an illustrative embodiment of the present invention. OTEC system 100 comprises offshore platform 102, turbogenerator 104, closed-loop conduit 106, evaporator 110-1, condenser 110-2, hull 112, pumps 114, 116, and 124, and conduits 120, 122, 128, and 130.

[0033] Offshore platform 102 is a tension leg offshore platform comprising buoyant hull 112, which includes a deck, caissons, and pontoons. The hull is supported above seabed 136 by rigid tension legs that are anchored to seabed 136 at deployment location 134. For clarity, the deck, caisson, pontoons, and tension legs are not shown in FIG. 1.

[0034] In some embodiments, offshore platform 102 is deployed at a deployment location in a body of water other than an ocean (e.g., a lake, sea, etc.). In some embodiments, offshore platform 102 is an offshore platform other than a tension leg offshore platform, such as a semi-submersible, spar, drill ship, jack-up offshore platform, grazing plant, and the like. It will be clear to one skilled in the art how to specify, make, and use platform 102.

[0035] Turbogenerator 104 is a conventional turbine-driven generator mounted on hull 112. Turbogenerator 104 generates electrical energy in response to a flow of fluid and provides the generated electrical energy on output cable 138.

[0036] Closed-loop conduit 106 is a conduit for conveying working fluid 108 through evaporator 110-1, condenser 110-2, and turbogenerator 104.

[0037] Evaporator 110-1 is a shell-and-tube heat exchanger that is configured to transfer heat from warm seawater in surface region 118 and working fluid 108 thereby inducing the working fluid to vaporize.

[0038] Condenser 110-2 is a shell-and-tube heat exchanger that is configured to transfer heat from vaporized working fluid 108 to cold seawater from deep-water region 126 thereby inducing condensation of vaporized working fluid 108 back into liquid form. Evaporator 110-1 and condenser 110-2 are mechanically and fluidically coupled with offshore platform 102.

[0039] One skilled in the art will recognize that the operation of a heat exchanger as evaporator or condenser is dependent upon the manner in which it is fluidically configured within OTEC system 100. A shell-and-tube heat exchanger (i.e., heat exchanger 110) in accordance with the illustrative embodiment of the present invention is described in more detail below and with respect to FIG. 4.

[0040] Turbogenerator 104, closed-loop conduit 106, evaporator 110, and condenser 112 collectively form a Rankine-cycle engine that generates electrical energy based on the difference in the temperature of water in surface region 118 and the temperature of water in deep-water region 126.

[0041] In typical operation, pump 114 pumps working fluid 108, in liquid form, through closed-loop conduit 106 to evaporator 110-1. Ammonia is often used as working fluid 108 in OTEC systems; however, it will be clear to one skilled in the art that any fluid that evaporates at the temperature of the water in surface region 118 and condenses at the temperature of the water in deep water region 126 is suitable for use as working fluid 108 (subject to material compatibility constraints).

[0042] Pump 116 draws warm seawater from surface region 118 into evaporator 110 via conduit 120. In a typical OTEC deployment, the water in surface region 118 is at a substantially constant temperature of approximately 25 degrees centigrade (subject to weather and sunlight conditions). At evaporator 110-1, heat from the warm water is absorbed by working fluid 108, which induces the working fluid to vaporize. After passing through evaporator 110-1, the now slightly cooler water is ejected back into ocean 140 via conduit 122. The output of conduit 122 is typically located deeper in ocean 140 than surface region 118 (i.e., mid-level

region 132) to avoid decreasing the average water temperature in the surface-water region.

[0043] The expanding working fluid 108 vapor is forced through turbogenerator 104, thereby driving the turbogenerator to generate electrical energy. The generated electrical energy is provided on output cable 138. After passing through turbogenerator 104, the vaporized working fluid enters condenser 110-2.

[0044] Pump 124 draws cold seawater from deep-water region 126 into condenser 110-2 via conduit 128. Typically deep-water region 126 is approximately 1000 meters below the surface of the body of water, at which depth water is at a substantially constant temperature of a few degrees centigrade. The cold water travels through condenser 110-2 where it absorbs heat from the vaporized working fluid. As a result, working fluid 108 condenses back into liquid form. After passing through condenser 110-2, the now slightly warmer water is ejected into ocean 140 via conduit 130. The output of conduit 130 is typically located at a shallower depth in ocean 140 than that of deep-water region 126 (i.e., mid-level region 132) to avoid increasing the average water temperature in the deep-water region.

[0045] Pump 114 pumps the condensed working fluid 108 back into evaporator 110-1 where it is again vaporized, thereby continuing the Rankine cycle that drives turbogenerator 104.

[0046] FIG. 2 depicts a conventional shell-and-tube heat exchanger as is known in the prior art. Heat exchanger 200 comprises tubes 202, tube sheets 204, baffles 206, input plenum 208, output plenum 210, shell 212, secondary inlet 214, and secondary outlet 216. Heat exchanger 200 transfers heat between a primary fluid and a secondary fluid. For a heat exchanger intended for use in OTEC applications, the primary fluid is typically a working fluid, such as ammonia, and the secondary fluid is typically seawater.

[0047] Tubes 202 are straight, untwisted conduits made of a thermally conductive material, such as copper alloy, stainless steel, carbon steel, non-ferrous copper alloy, Inconel, nickel, Hastelloy and titanium. Working fluid is provided to heat exchanger 200 at input 218. Input 218 is fluidically connected to input plenum 208, which distributes the working fluid to each of tubes 202. Tubes 202 convey the working fluid to output plenum 210, which collects the working fluid and provides it to output 220. Input 218 and output 220 are typically connected to a closed-loop conduit that conveys the working fluid.

[0048] Tube sheets 204 are substantially identical plates, each comprising an array of holes that accept one of tubes 202. Tubes 202 are affixed to tube sheets 204 by, for example, flaring the ends of the tubes to mechanically “swage” the tubes within the holes. Alternatively, brazing, bonding or welding is used to join the tubes and the tube sheets.

[0049] The holes in tube sheet 204 are arranged in a two-dimensional arrangement that sets the separation between tubes 202 to provide for a large number of tubes in the shell-and-tube heat exchanger. Since heat transfer primarily occurs in the heat exchanger through the sidewalls of the tubes, it is desirable to include as many tubes in a heat exchanger as possible to substantially maximize the surface area through which heat can be transferred between the primary and secondary fluids. The spacing between tubes 202 must also be sufficient to enable a reasonable flow rate of secondary fluid

around and along tubes 202, without reducing the efficiency of the heat exchanger due to the development of fluidic back pressure.

[0050] Baffles 206 are distributed along the length of tubes 202 to increase the interaction time and length between the secondary fluid and the walls of tubes 202. Baffles 206, however, also restrict the flow of secondary fluid through heat exchanger 200; thereby increasing back pressure for the secondary fluid, increasing the force with which the secondary fluid must be pumped, and reducing the overall heat transfer efficiency of the heat exchanger.

[0051] Primary (a.k.a., working) fluid is introduced to tubes 202 through input plenum 208. Input plenum 208 is typically brazed or welded to tube sheet 204. In similar fashion, primary fluid exits tubes 202 via output plenum 210, which is typically brazed or welded to its respective tube sheet 204.

[0052] Shell 212 encloses tubes 202 and forms a conduit for secondary fluid. Shell 212 is typically bolted to tube sheets 204. Normally, a gasket is included between the shell and tube sheet to provide a fluidic seal.

[0053] Secondary fluid is introduced into shell 212 through secondary inlet 214 and exits heat exchanger 200 through secondary outlet 216. Secondary inlet 214 and secondary outlet 216 are typically brazed or welded to shell 212.

[0054] Unfortunately, conventional shell-and-tube heat exchangers have several issues, particularly with respect to their use in an OTEC system. Tube material must be chosen to have good thermal conductivity, but also to withstand large thermal stresses that develop due to the temperature differential between the primary and secondary working fluids. In addition, the primary and secondary fluids are often at high pressure, which adds to the bending moments to which tubes 202 are subject. Further, the tube material must also be compatible with both the shell-and-tube side fluids for long periods under the operating conditions (e.g., temperatures, pressures, flows, pH, etc.) to mitigate the effects of corrosion. Still further, the choice of tube material and/or joining material (e.g., brazing compounds or welding material, etc.) could result in a leak through a tube between the shell-and-tube sides causing fluid cross-contamination and possibly loss of pressure and failure of the heat exchanger.

[0055] FIG. 3A depicts a twisted tube suitable for use in a shell-and-tube heat exchanger in accordance with the prior art. Tube 302 is a straight, oval-shaped conduit suitable for use as a tube 202 in heat exchanger 200. In contrast to tube 202, however, tube 302 is individually twisted about its longitudinal axis 304. It should be noted that while the oval cross-section of tube 302 rotates about longitudinal axis 304, longitudinal axis 304 remains substantially straight along the length of tube 302.

[0056] FIG. 3B depicts a series of cross-section views of tube 302 at different points along the z-direction.

[0057] At point A along the z-direction, major-axis 306 of the oval cross-section of tube 302 is aligned with the x-direction. At point B, major-axis 306 has rotated to approximately 60° in the x-y plane. At point C, major-axis 306 has rotated another 60 degrees to approximately 120° in the x-y plane. Point D is at approximately one-half the wavelength of the rotational period of tube 302, and major-axis 306 is again aligned with the x-direction. Additional rotation of tube 302 of approximately 60° about longitudinal axis 304 occurs between each of points E, F, and G. As a result, major-axis 306 is again at approximately 60° and 120°, respectively, in the x-y plane. Point G represents one full wavelength of the

rotational period of tube **302**; therefore, major-axis **306** is again aligned with the x-direction.

[0058] The twisted structure of tube **302** results in an increase of the surface area of its tube walls. As a result, heat transfer between primary and secondary fluid through the tube walls of tube **302** can be more efficient than that of tube **202**. In addition, the mechanical resonant frequency of a twisted tube is higher than a comparable untwisted tube, which makes tubes **302** more resistant than tubes **202** to lateral deflection due to forces exerted by secondary fluid flow through a heat exchanger.

[0059] Tube **302** has several drawbacks, however. Individually twisted tubes are harder to clean and are more prone to bio-fouling than untwisted tubes. Individually twisted tubes also require tight packing to retain an interlocking/high section modulus. This need for tight packing places undesirable constraints on the arrangement of the tubes within a shell-and-tube heat exchanger.

[0060] FIG. 4 depicts a shell-and-tube heat exchanger in accordance with an illustrative embodiment of the present invention. Heat exchanger **110** comprises tube sheets **402**, tube bundles **404-1** through **404-N**, shell **408**, inlet **410**, and outlet **412**.

[0061] Tube sheets **402** are analogous to tube sheets **204** and **206** of heat exchanger **100**; however, the hole arrangement of tube sheets **402** accommodates tube bundles **404-1** through **404-N** (referred to, collectively, as tube bundles **404**).

[0062] Tube sheets **402** are made of marine-grade aluminum alloy. Certain alloys of aluminum are well-suited to OTEC applications by virtue of their resistance to corrosion in sea water. Further, aluminum and most of its alloys are amenable to the use of the friction-stir welding (FSW) joining technique.

[0063] Friction-stir welding is a well-known method for joining two elements of the same material. Conventional FSW employs a rotating probe that is forced into the interface between the two elements. The immense friction between the probe and materials causes material in the immediate vicinity of the probe to heat up to temperatures below its melting point. This softens the adjoining sections, but because the material remains in a solid state, its original material properties are retained. Movement of the probe along the weld line forces the softened material from the two pieces towards the trailing edge causing the adjacent regions to fuse, thereby forming a weld.

[0064] As opposed to other common joining techniques, such as fusion welding, brazing, etc., FSW has several performance advantages. In particular, the resultant weld is comprised of the same material as the joined sections. As a result, galvanic corrosion due to contact between dissimilar metals at the joint is reduced or eliminated. Furthermore, the resultant weld retains the material properties of the material of the joined sections.

[0065] The use of FSW to join the components of heat exchanger **110** affords the present invention several advantages, as described below.

[0066] Each of tube bundles **404** comprises tubes **406-1** through **406-3** (referred to, collectively, as tubes **406**). Tubes **406** are extruded tubes made of the same material as tube sheets **402**. In some embodiments, tubes **406** are drawn tubes. In some embodiments, tubes **406** are formed such that they are substantially seamless. Tubes **406** convey seawater through the length of heat exchanger **110**. Although in the illustrative embodiment, each of tube bundles **404** comprises

three tubes, it will be clear to one skilled in the art, after reading this specification, how to make and use alternative embodiments of the present invention wherein at least one tube bundle comprises more or less than three tubes.

[0067] Although the illustrative embodiment comprises tubes and tube sheets that are made of aluminum, it will be clear to one skilled in the art, after reading this specification, how to specify, make, and use alternative embodiments of the present invention that comprise components that are made of another material that is substantially resistant to corrosion, particularly in an ocean environment. The material used for tube sheets **402** and tubes **406** should not exhibit excessive corrosion in an ocean environment over the lifetime of the heat exchanger. In addition, the material used for tube sheets **402** and tubes **406** should be substantially thermally conductive. Materials suitable for use in tube sheets **402** and tubes **406** include, without limitation, aluminum, aluminum alloys, ceramics, steel alloys, titanium, titanium alloys, thermally conductive plastics, thermally conductive polymers, and the like.

[0068] In some embodiments, a joining technique other than FSW is used to join components together with a substantially galvanic corrosion-resistant joint. In some embodiments, suitable joining techniques include, without limitation, some types of fusion welding, the use of elastomeric, thermoplastic, thermoset or epoxy-based joint compounds, and the like.

[0069] The size, length, and wall thickness of each of tubes **406** are design parameters that are dependent on the particular implementation of the present invention. For exemplary purposes, however, in the illustrative embodiment, each of tubes **406** is approximately 24 millimeter (mm) in diameter, is approximately 10 meters long, and has a wall thickness of approximately 2.54 mm.

[0070] Tube bundles **404** are described in more detail below and with respect to FIGS. 5A and 5B.

[0071] Tube bundles **404** are arranged at tube sheets **402** in a hexagonal close-packed arrangement. In some embodiments, tube bundles **404** are arranged at tube sheets **402** in a packing arrangement other than a hexagonal close-packed arrangement.

[0072] Shell **408** is a shell suitable for enclosing tube bundles **404** and also for conveying primary (i.e., working) fluid along the surfaces of tubes **406**. Shell **408** is made of a material that is suitably resistant to corrosion or other damage as a result of exposure to the working fluid.

[0073] Working fluid enters shell **408** through inlet **410** and exits shell **408** through outlet **412**. As a result, working fluid is conveyed along and between tubes **406** enabling efficient heat transfer between the seawater within tubes **406** and the working fluid. It will be clear to one skilled in the art how to specify, make, and use inlet **410** and outlet **412**.

[0074] It should be noted that in the illustrative embodiment, heat exchanger **110** operates in a manner opposite to heat exchanger **200** in that secondary fluid (i.e., seawater) is conveyed through each of the tubes in tube bundles **404** and working fluid is conveyed around and along the tubes during its progress through shell **408**. One skilled in the art will recognize, however, after reading this specification, that heat exchanger **110** can operate in a similar manner as heat exchanger **200**, wherein working fluid flows through tubes **408** and secondary fluid (e.g., seawater) flows through shell **408**.

[0075] FIG. 5A depicts a tube bundle in accordance with the illustrative embodiment of the present invention. Tube bundle 404-*i* comprises tubes 406-1, 406-2, and 406-3 and optional bundle shroud 502.

[0076] Ends 504-1 through 504-3 of tubes 406-1 through 406-3 are arranged at tube sheet 402 (not shown) in a symmetrical arrangement about central axis 506. Tube bundle 404-*i* is twisted, as a unit, about central axis 506 to form a helically wound arrangement. The outer radius of the helically wound bundle, periodicity of the helical wound spiral, and the outer radius of the bundle, are matters of design.

[0077] In some embodiments, tubes 406-1 through 406-3 are rigidly attached to one another. Motion of an individual tube with respect to the tube bundle, therefore is disallowed. In some embodiments, tubes 406-1 through 406-3 are partially attached to one another, such as only at those points where the tubes within a tube bundle meet as a consequence of their helically wound configuration. Motion of an individual tube with respect to the tube bundle, therefore, is restricted. As a result, tube bundles in accordance with the present invention are characterized by higher mechanical stiffness.

[0078] Heat exchangers in accordance with the present invention have several advantages over heat exchangers of the prior-art that comprise straight, untwisted tubes, such as:

- [0079] i. improved heat transfer efficiency due to larger tube wall surface area; or
- [0080] ii. increased tube stiffness; or
- [0081] iii. increased resistance to flow-induced vibration of the tubes; or
- [0082] iv. improved flow of secondary fluid; or
- [0083] v. high section modulus; or
- [0084] vi. any combination of i, ii, iii, iv, and v.

[0085] Heat exchangers in accordance with the present invention have several advantages over heat exchangers of the prior-art that comprise individual twisted tubes, such as:

- [0086] i. reduced susceptibility to bio-fouling; or
- [0087] ii. improved immunity to corrosion; or
- [0088] iii. improved surface area per tube; or
- [0089] iv. improved secondary fluid flow; or
- [0090] v. any combination of i, ii, iii, and iv.

[0091] It should be noted that the helical arrangement of tubes enhances heat flow between the primary and secondary fluids by breaking up boundary layers inside and/or outside the tubes and combining axial and radial flow of fluid along and around the outer surface of the tubes. The swirling flow of the fluid through the tubes enhances heat transfer across the fluid boundary layer with relatively little increase in pressure drop through the heat exchanger. As a result, in some embodiments, baffles to redirect fluid flow through shell 502, such as baffles 206 described above and with respect to FIG. 2, are not required.

[0092] FIG. 5B depicts an end-view of tube bundle 404-*i* in accordance with the illustrative embodiment of the present invention.

[0093] Tube 406-1 comprises sidewall 508-1. Sidewall 508-1 is joined with tube sheet 402 using FSW to form a substantially leak-proof seal around the outer perimeter of tube 406-1. FSW is a method of joining two elements without incorporating a dissimilar material. FSW-welded joints substantially retain the bulk material properties of the material joined and the metal grain boundaries of the materials joined are normally not adversely affected. FSW is described in detail in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/484,542, filed

Jun. 15, 2009 (Attorney Docket: 711-231US), which is incorporated herein by reference. FSW is an example of a joining technology that results in a substantially galvanic corrosion-resistant joint.

[0094] The joint formed between sidewall 508-1 and tube sheet 402 avoids the formation of crevices that typically exist between mechanically rolled tube ends and the surrounding tube sheet material in a conventional shell-and-tube heat exchanger. By avoiding these crevices, the lifetime of a heat exchanger in accordance with the present invention can be significantly longer since corrosion due to exposure to corrosive seawater in the crevices is mitigated or eliminated.

[0095] In similar fashion, tube 406-2 comprises sidewall 508-2. Sidewall 508-2 is joined with tube sheet 402 by means of friction-stir welding (FSW) to form a substantially leak-proof seal around the perimeter of tube 406-2. Further, tube 406-3 comprises sidewall 508-3. Sidewall 508-3 is joined with tube sheet 402 by means of friction-stir welding (FSW) to form a substantially leak-proof seal around the perimeter of tube 406-3.

[0096] One skilled in the art will recognize, however, that the FSW process leaves heat-affected zone 510-1, which surrounds the bond between sidewall 508-1 and tube sheet 402. The lateral extent of this heat-affected zone limits the minimum spacing between tube sidewalls 508-1 through 508-3 at each of tube sheets 402.

[0097] The helical tube bundles act as spring elements that can readily handle a pre-load or axial loading resulting from pressure differences between tube and shell side, or temperature expansion/contraction variations between materials. In some embodiments, the tubes within one or more of tube bundles 404 are pre-loaded to increase their resonant frequency and, therefore, their resistance to flow-induced vibration during operation.

[0098] In addition, the increased stiffness of helically arranged tubes makes heat exchangers in accordance with the present invention amenable to vertical operation, such as in an upward-flowing shell-side evaporator or a downward flowing shell-side condenser.

[0099] It should be noted that tube bundles 404 can be formed in any of several ways. In some embodiments, one or more of tube bundles 404 is formed by winding pre-formed tubes about central axis 506, in similar fashion to the method described below and with respect to FIGS. 7A-C and 8. Alternatively, one or more of tube bundles 404 can be formed in its helically wound arrangement by extruding all of the tubes 502 in the plurality of tubes 406 at the same time, while simultaneously rotating an extrusion die or the extruded material during the extrusion process.

[0100] FIG. 6 depicts an arrangement of tube bundles in accordance with a first alternative embodiment of the present invention.

[0101] Heat exchanger 600 comprises a hexagonally close-packed arrangement of tube bundles 404. Each tube bundle is enclosed within bundle shroud 602. Each bundle shroud is fluidically isolated from the other bundle shrouds, which enables heat exchanger 600 to carry different fluids through different bundle shrouds. Further, in some embodiments, one or more tubes within tube bundles 404 convey a different fluid from at least one other tube within the tube bundles.

[0102] For example, each tube within tube bundle 404-1 carries a first secondary fluid while each tube within each of tube bundles 404-2 through 404-N carries a second secondary fluid. Further, bundle shroud 602-2 conveys a first primary

fluid while each of bundle shrouds 602-1 and 602-3 through 602-N conveys a second primary fluid.

[0103] One skilled in the art will recognize, after reading this specification, that the arrangement depicted in FIG. 6 can be larger heat exchangers

[0104] FIG. 7A depicts a tube bundle in accordance with a second alternative embodiment of the present invention. Tube bundle 700 comprises center tube 702 and outer tubes 704.

[0105] Each of tubes 702 and 704 is analogous to one of tubes 406 described above and with respect to FIG. 3.

[0106] Tube bundle 700 is analogous to one of tube bundles 404, with the exception that center tube 702 is straight and untwisted and outer tubes 704 are wound about center tube 702. Center tube 702 is co-linear with central axis 706 of tube bundle 700.

[0107] Although tube bundle 700 comprises six outer tubes 704, it will be clear to one skilled in the art, after reading this specification, how to specify, make, and use alternative embodiments of the present invention wherein tube bundle 700 comprises other than six outer tubes 704 and/or more than one center tube 702.

[0108] FIG. 7B depicts tube bundle 700 prior to the winding of outer tubes 704 about center tube 702.

[0109] FIG. 7C depicts bundle assembly mechanism for forming a tube bundle in accordance with the second alternative embodiment of the present invention. Mechanism 708 comprises support structure 710, fixed end cap 712, and rotatable end cap 714.

[0110] In a representative method for forming tube bundle 700, center tube 702 and outer tubes 704 are inserted into fixed end cap 712 and rotatable end cap 714. Rotating end cap 714 is then rotated to wind outer tubes 704 about central axis 706 until the desired amount of winding and periodicity of the helical arrangement of outer tubes 704 is achieved. Tube bundle 700 is then removed from each of fixed end cap 712 and rotatable end cap 714.

[0111] FIG. 8 depicts a guide for holding outer tubes 704 and center tube 702 during and/or after formation of tube bundle 700. Guide 800 keeps outer tubes 704 bundled together by means of arms 802. Aperture 804 enables guides 800 to rotate about center tube 702 without inducing torsional strain on the center tube. In some embodiments, a plurality of guides is arranged along the length of tube bundle 700.

[0112] It is to be understood that the disclosure teaches just one example of the illustrative embodiment and that many variations of the invention can easily be devised by those skilled in the art after reading this disclosure and that the scope of the present invention is to be determined by the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A heat exchanger comprising a first tube bundle having a first central axis, wherein the first tube bundle comprises a first plurality of tubes for conveying a first fluid, and wherein the first tube bundle is helically wound about the first central axis.

2. The heat exchanger of claim 1 further comprising:
a first tube sheet comprising a first material; and
a second tube sheet comprising the first material;
wherein each of the first plurality of tubes has a first end, a second end, and a tube wall, and wherein each of the first plurality of tubes comprises the first material;

wherein the first tube sheet and the tube wall at each of the first ends are joined with a substantially leak-proof seal comprising a substantially galvanic corrosion-resistant joint; and

wherein the second tube sheet and the tube wall at each of the second ends are joined with a substantially leak-proof seal comprising a substantially galvanic corrosion-resistant joint.

3. The heat exchanger of claim 2 further comprising:
a shell, wherein the shell, the first tube sheet, and the second tube sheet collectively define a chamber that contains the first tube bundle;
an inlet for introducing a second fluid into the chamber; and
an outlet for enabling the second fluid to egress the chamber;

wherein the first fluid in each of the first plurality of tubes is fluidically isolated from the second fluid.

4. The heat exchanger of claim 2 wherein the first material comprises aluminum.

5. The heat exchanger of claim 2 wherein each of the first tube sheet, second tube sheet, and the first plurality of tubes consists essentially of the first material.

6. The heat exchanger of claim 2 wherein each of the first tube sheet, second tube sheet, and the first plurality of tubes consists of the first material.

7. The heat exchanger of claim 2 wherein each of the galvanic corrosion-resistant joints is a friction-stir welded joint.

8. The heat exchanger of claim 1 wherein the first tube bundle is one of a plurality of tube bundles, and wherein the plurality of tube bundles are arranged in a hexagonal close-packed arrangement at a first tube sheet.

9. The heat exchanger of claim 1 wherein the first plurality of tubes comprises a first tube that is coincident with the first central axis, and wherein the first tube is straight and non-twisted.

10. The heat exchanger of claim 1 wherein motion of each tube of the first plurality of tubes relative to the other tubes of the first plurality of tubes is inhibited.

11. The heat exchanger of claim 1 wherein motion of each tube of the first plurality of tubes relative to the other tubes of the first plurality of tubes is disallowed.

12. The heat exchanger of claim 1 further comprising:
a second tube bundle having a second central axis, wherein the second tube bundle comprises a second plurality of tubes for conveying a second fluid;

a first shroud for conveying a third fluid, wherein the first shroud encloses the first tube bundle, and wherein the third fluid and first fluid are fluidically isolated;

a second shroud for conveying a fourth fluid, wherein the second shroud encloses the second tube bundle, and wherein the fourth fluid and second fluid are fluidically isolated;

wherein the third fluid and the fourth fluid are fluidically isolated.

13. The heat exchanger of claim 12 wherein the first fluid and the second fluid are the same fluid.

14. The heat exchanger of claim 1 wherein at least one tube of the first tube bundle is subjected to a pre-load force.

15. A method for forming a heat exchanger, wherein the method comprises:

providing a first tube bundle comprising a first plurality of tubes, wherein each of the first plurality of tubes has a first end, a second end, and a tube wall, and wherein the

first tube bundle has a first central axis, and wherein the first tube bundle is helically wound about the first central axis;

sealing a first tube sheet and the tube wall at the first end of each tube of the first tube bundle with a substantially galvanic corrosion-resistant joint; and

sealing a second tube sheet and the tube wall at the second end of each tube of the first tube bundle with a substantially galvanic corrosion-resistant joint.

16. The method of claim 15 further comprising enclosing the first tube bundle in a shell, wherein a first fluid that flows in each tube of a first tube bundle is fluidically isolated from a second fluid that flows through the shell.

17. The method of claim 15 further comprising: providing the first tube sheet, wherein the first tube sheet comprises a first material;

providing the second tube sheet, wherein the second tube sheet comprises the first material; and

providing the first plurality of tubes, wherein each of the first plurality of tubes comprises the first material; wherein the galvanic corrosion-resistant joints are formed using friction-stir welding.

18. The method of claim 15 further comprising: providing the first tube sheet, wherein the first tube sheet consists essentially of a first material;

providing the second tube sheet, wherein the second tube sheet consists essentially of the first material; and

providing the first plurality of tubes, wherein each of the first plurality of tubes consists essentially of the first material;

wherein the galvanic corrosion-resistant joints are formed using friction-stir welding.

19. The method of claim 15 further comprising: providing the first tube sheet, wherein the first tube sheet consists of a first material;

providing the second tube sheet, wherein the second tube sheet consists of the first material; and

providing the first plurality of tubes, wherein each of the first plurality of tubes consists of the first material; wherein the galvanic corrosion-resistant joints are formed using friction-stir welding.

20. The method of claim 15 further comprising: providing a first plurality of first tube bundles; and

sealing the first tube sheet and the tube wall at the first end of each tube of each of the first plurality of first tube bundles with a substantially galvanic corrosion-resistant joint.

21. The method of claim 20 further comprising arranging the first tube bundle and the first plurality of first tube bundles in a hexagonal close-packed arrangement.

22. The method of claim 15 wherein the first tube bundle is provided such that the first tube bundle comprises a first tube that is coincident with the first central axis and a second plurality of tubes that are helically wound about the first tube, wherein the first tube is straight and untwisted.

23. The method of claim 22 further comprising forming the first tube bundle by operations comprising:

fixing the first end of each of the first plurality of tubes in a first end cap, wherein the first ends are arranged at the first end cap with a central first end coincident with the first central axis and the remaining first ends equidistant from the central first end;

arranging the second end of each of the first plurality of tubes at a second end cap, wherein the second ends are

arranged at the second end cap with a central second end coincident with the first central axis and the remaining second ends equidistant from the central second end; and

rotating the second end cap about the first central axis.

24. A heat exchanger comprising:

a first tube bundle comprising a first plurality of tubes that consist of a first material, wherein each of the first plurality of tubes has a first end, a second end, and a tube wall, and wherein the first tube bundle has a first central axis, and wherein the first tube bundle is helically wound about the first central axis; and

a first tube sheet that consists of the first material; wherein the first tube sheet and the tube wall at the first end of each tube of the first tube bundle are joined with a friction-stir welded joint.

25. The heat exchanger of claim 24 further comprising:

a second tube bundle comprising a second plurality of tubes that consist of the first material, wherein each of the second plurality of tubes has a first end, a second end, and a tube wall, and wherein the second tube bundle has a second central axis, and wherein the second tube bundle is helically wound about the second central axis;

a third tube bundle comprising a third plurality of tubes that consist of the first material, wherein each of the third plurality of tubes has a first end, a second end, and a tube wall, and wherein the third tube bundle has a third central axis, and wherein the third tube bundle is helically wound about the third central axis;

a fourth tube bundle comprising a fourth plurality of tubes that consist of the first material, wherein each of the fourth plurality of tubes has a first end, a second end, and a tube wall, and wherein the fourth tube bundle has a fourth central axis, and wherein the fourth tube bundle is helically wound about the fourth central axis;

a fifth tube bundle comprising a fifth plurality of tubes that consist of the first material, wherein each of the fifth plurality of tubes has a first end, a second end, and a tube wall, and wherein the fifth tube bundle has a fifth central axis, and wherein the fifth tube bundle is helically wound about the fifth central axis;

a sixth tube bundle comprising a sixth plurality of tubes that consist of the first material, wherein each of the sixth plurality of tubes has a first end, a second end, and a tube wall, and wherein the sixth tube bundle has a sixth central axis, and wherein the sixth tube bundle is helically wound about the sixth central axis; and

a seventh tube bundle comprising a seventh plurality of tubes that consist of the first material, wherein each of the seventh plurality of tubes has a first end, a second end, and a tube wall, and wherein the seventh tube bundle has a seventh central axis, and wherein the seventh tube bundle is helically wound about the seventh central axis;

wherein the first tube sheet and the tube wall at the first end of each tube of the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh tube bundles are joined with a friction-stir welded joint, and wherein the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh tube bundles are arranged in a hexagonal close-packed arrangement at the first tube sheet.