US 20070284097A1

(19) **United States**
(12) **Patent Application Publication**
(10) **Pub. No.: US 2007/0284097 A1**
(43) **Pub. Date: Dec. 13, 2007**

Swor et al.

(54) **CONSUMABLE DOWNHOLE TOOLS**

(75) Inventors: **Loren Swor**, Duncan, OK (US); **Phillip Starr**, Duncan, OK (US); **Don R. Smith**, Duncan, OK (US); **Brian K. Wilkinson**, Duncan, OK (US)

Correspondence Address:
JOHN W. WUSTENBERG
P.O. BOX 1431
DUNCAN, OK 73536

(73) Assignee: **Halliburton Energy Services, Inc.**, Houston, TX (US)

(21) Appl. No.: **11/423,076**

(22) Filed: **Jun. 8, 2006**

Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.**
E21B 36/00 (2006.01)
E21B 29/02 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **166/59**; 166/58; 166/63; 166/118

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A downhole tool having a body or structural component comprises a material that is at least partially consumed when exposed to heat and a source of oxygen. The material may comprise a metal, such as magnesium, which is converted to magnesium oxide when exposed to heat and a source of oxygen. The downhole tool may further comprise a torch with a fuel load that produces the heat and source of oxygen when burned. The fuel load may comprise a flammable, non-explosive solid, such as thermite.

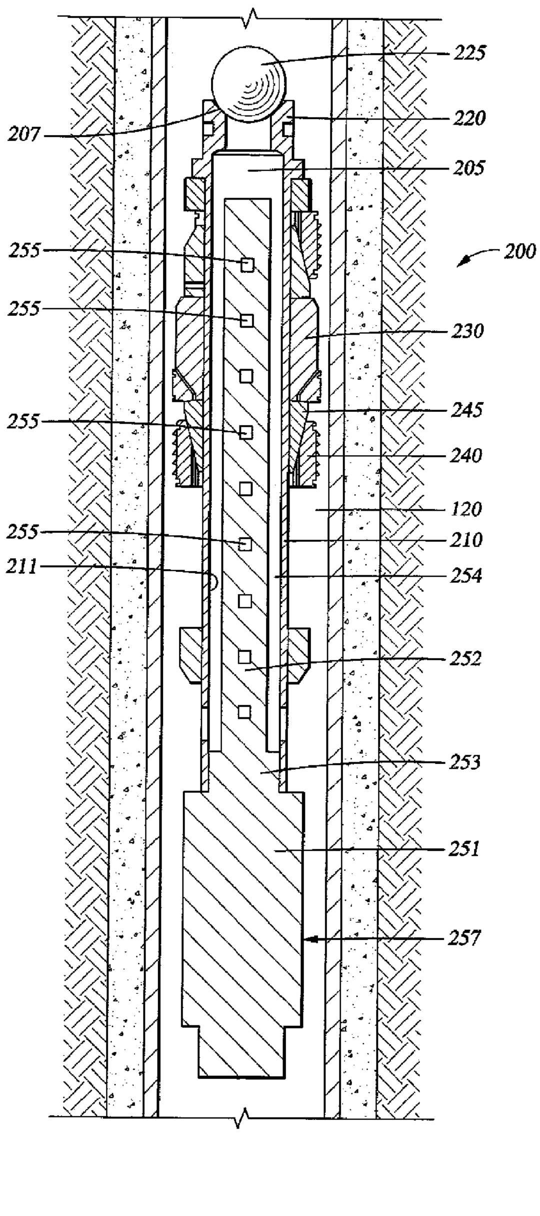
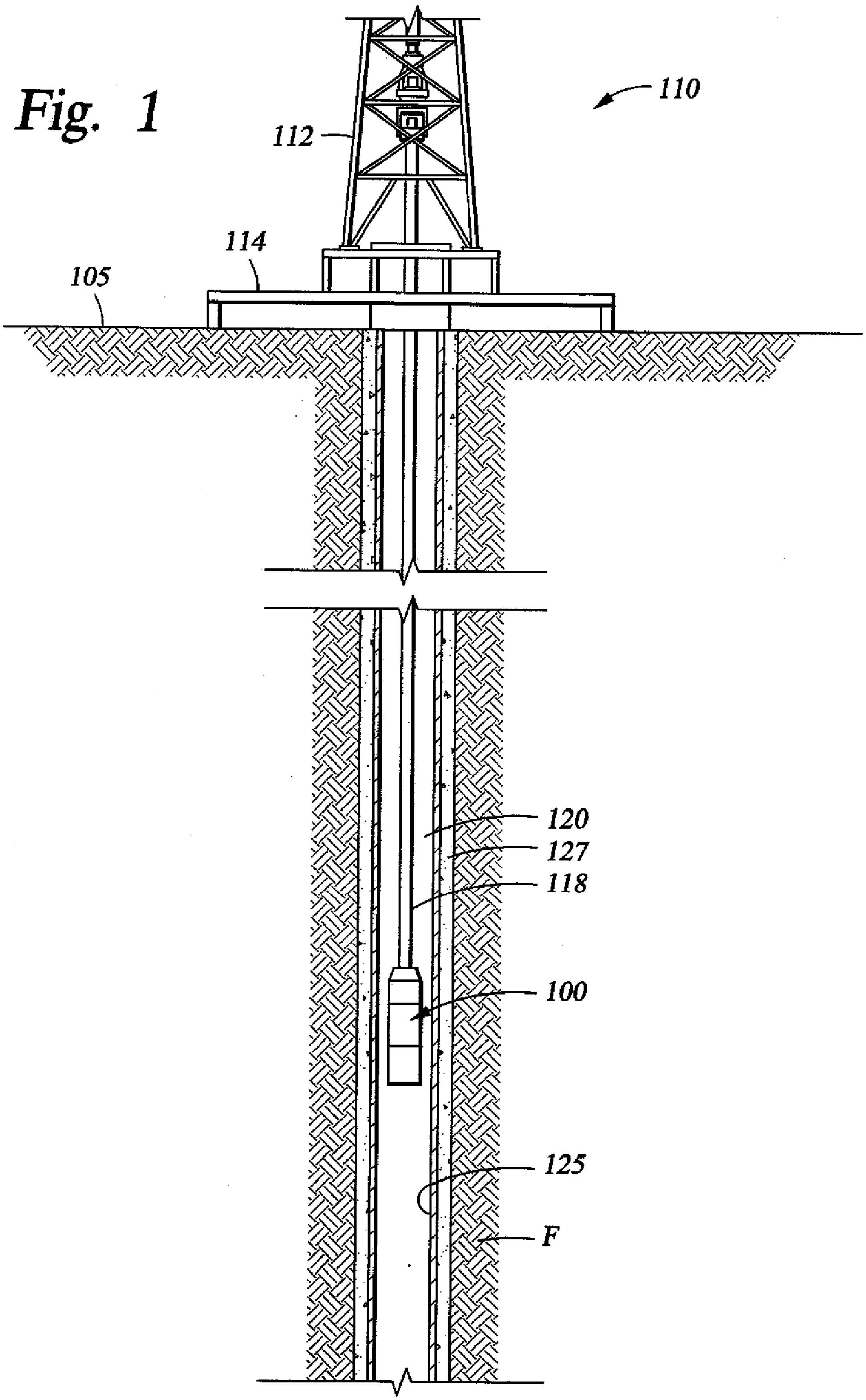


Fig. 1



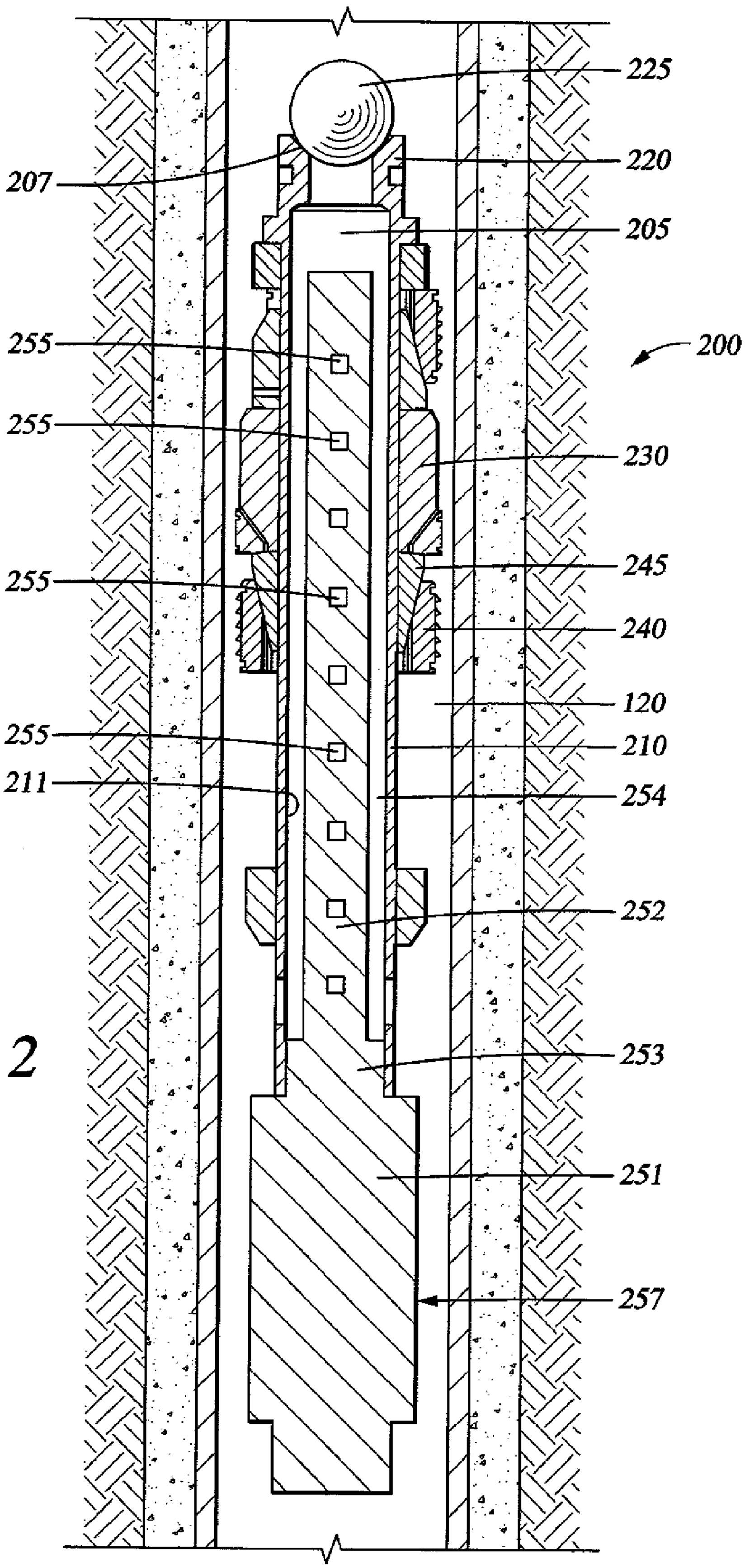

225
220
207
205
255
255
200
230
255
245
240
120
255
210
211
254
252
253
251
257

Fig. 2

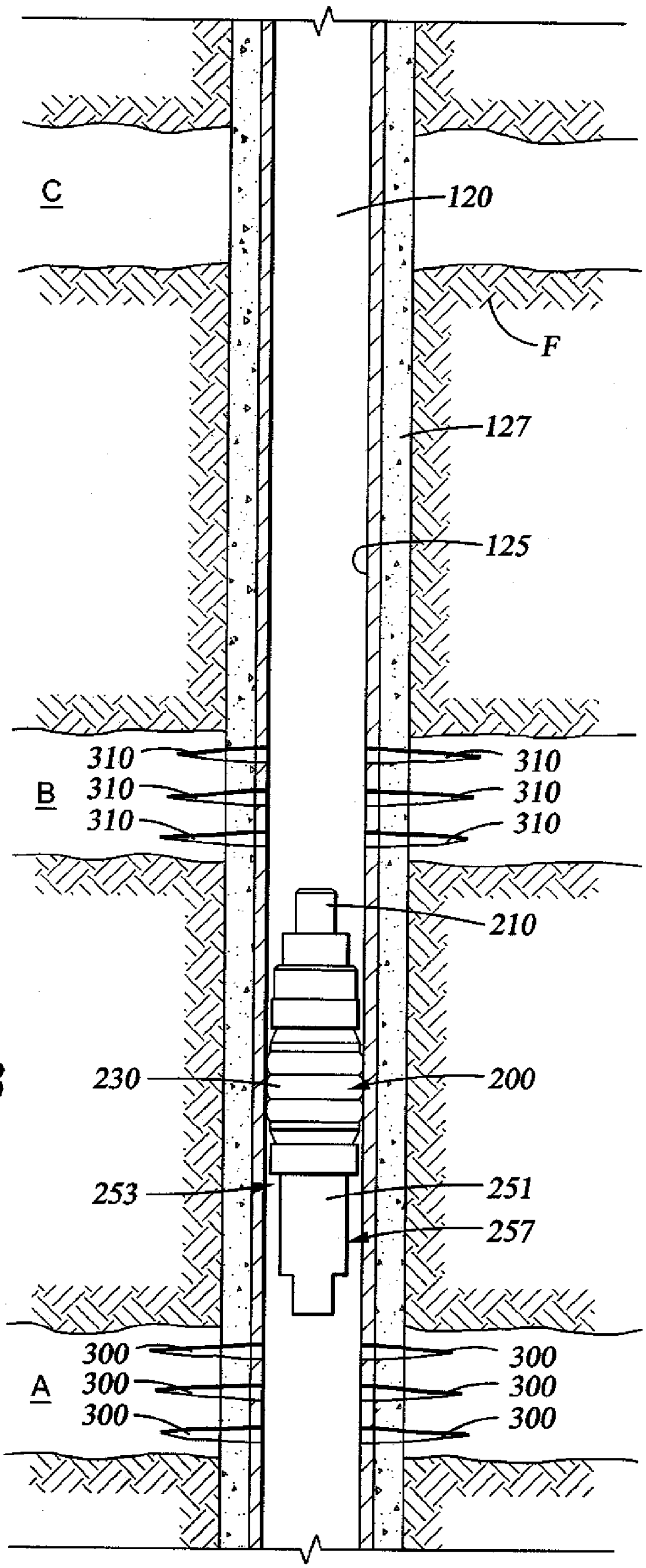

C
120
F
127
125
310
310
310
310
310
310
B
210
230
200
253
251
257
300
300
300
300
300
300
A

Fig. 3

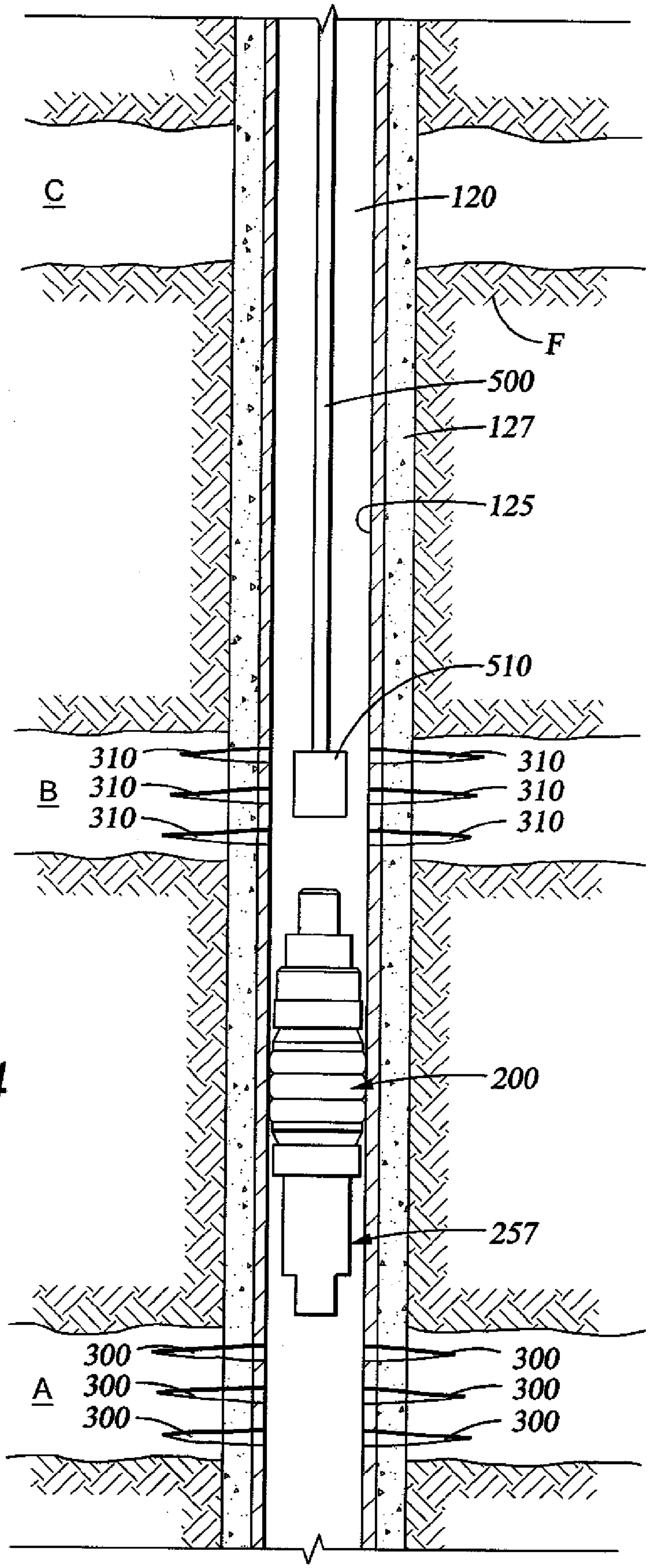

C
120
F
500
127
125
510
310
310
310
310
310
310
B
200
257
300
300
300
300
300
300
A

Fig. 4

CONSUMABLE DOWNHOLE TOOLS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] None.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

[0002] Not applicable.

REFERENCE TO A MICROFICHE APPENDIX

[0003] Not applicable.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0004] The present invention relates to consumable downhole tools and methods of removing such tools from well bores. More particularly, the present invention relates to downhole tools comprising materials that are burned and/or consumed when exposed to heat and an oxygen source and methods and systems for consuming such downhole tools in situ.

BACKGROUND

[0005] A wide variety of downhole tools may be used within a well bore in connection with producing hydrocarbons or reworking a well that extends into a hydrocarbon formation. Downhole tools such as frac plugs, bridge plugs, and packers, for example, may be used to seal a component against casing along the well bore wall or to isolate one pressure zone of the formation from another. Such downhole tools are well known in the art.

[0006] After the production or reworking operation is complete, these downhole tools must be removed from the well bore. Tool removal has conventionally been accomplished by complex retrieval operations, or by milling or drilling the tool out of the well bore mechanically. Thus, downhole tools are either retrievable or disposable. Disposable downhole tools have traditionally been formed of drillable metal materials such as cast iron, brass and aluminum. To reduce the milling or drilling time, the next generation of downhole tools comprises composites and other non-metallic materials, such as engineering grade plastics. Nevertheless, milling and drilling continues to be a time consuming and expensive operation. To eliminate the need for milling and drilling, other methods of removing disposable downhole tools have been developed, such as using explosives downhole to fragment the tool, and allowing the debris to fall down into the bottom of the well bore. This method, however, sometimes yields inconsistent results. Therefore, a need exists for disposable downhole tools that are reliably removable without being milled or drilled out, and for methods of removing such disposable downhole tools without tripping a significant quantity of equipment into the well bore.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] Disclosed herein is a downhole tool having a body or structural component comprising a material that is at least partially consumed when exposed to heat and a source of oxygen. In an embodiment, the material comprises a metal, and the metal may comprise magnesium, such that the magnesium metal is converted to magnesium oxide when exposed to heat and a source of oxygen. The downhole tool may further comprise an enclosure for storing an accelerant. In various embodiments, the downhole tool is a frac plug, a bridge plug, or a packer.

[0008] The downhole tool may further comprise a torch with a fuel load that produces the heat and source of oxygen when burned. In various embodiments, the fuel load comprises a flammable, non-explosive solid, or the fuel load comprises thermite. The torch may filcher comprise a torch body with a plurality of nozzles distributed along its length, and the nozzles may distribute molten plasma produced when the fuel load is burned. In an embodiment, the torch further comprises a firing mechanism with heat source to ignite the fuel load, and the ring mechanism may farther comprise a device to activate the heat source. In an embodiment, the firing mechanism is an electronic igniter. The device that activates the heat source may comprise an electronic timer, a mechanical timer, a spring-wound timer, a volume timer, or a measured flow timer, and the timer may be programmable to activate the heat source when pre-defined conditions are met. The pre-defined conditions comprise elapsed time, temperature, pressure, volume, or any combination thereof In another embodiment, the device that activates the heat source comprises a pressure-actuated firing head.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] FIG. **1** is a schematic, cross-sectional view of an exemplary operating environment depicting a consumable downhole tool being lowered into a well bore extending into a subterranean hydrocarbon formation;

[0010] FIG. **2** is an enlarged cross-sectional side view of one embodiment of a consumable downhole tool comprising a frac plug being lowered into a well bore;

[0011] FIG. **3** is an enlarged cross-sectional side view of a well bore with a representative consumable downhole tool with an internal firing mechanism sealed therein; and

[0012] FIG. **4** is an enlarged cross-sectional side view of a well bore with a consumable downhole tool sealed therein, and with a line lowering an alternate firing mechanism towards the tool.

NOTATION AND NOMENCLATURE

[0013] Certain terms are used throughout the following description and claims to refer to particular assembly components. This document does not intend to distinguish between components that differ in name but not function. In the following discussion and in the claims, the terms "including" and "comprising" are used in an open-ended fashion, and thus should be interpreted to mean "including, but not limited to . . . ".

[0014] Reference to up or down will be made for purposes of description with "up", "upper", "upwardly" or "upstream" meaning toward the surface of the well and with "down", "lower", "downwardly" or "downstream" meaning toward the lower end of the well, regardless of the well bore orientation. Reference to a body or a structural component refers to components that provide rigidity, load bearing ability and/or structural integrity to a device or tool.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0015] FIG. **1** schematically depicts an exemplary operating environment for a consumable downhole tool **100**. As depicted, a drilling rig **110** is positioned on the earth's surface **105** and extends over and around a well bore **120** that penetrates a subterranean formation F for the purpose of recovering hydrocarbons. At least the upper portion of the well bore **120** may be lined with casing **125** that is cemented **127** into position against the formation F in a conventional manner. The drilling rig **110** includes a derrick **112** with a rig floor **114** through which a work string **118**, such as a cable, wireline, E-line, Z-line, jointed pipe, or coiled tubing, for example, extends downwardly from the drilling rig **110** into the well bore **120**. The work string **118** suspends a representative consumable downhole tool **100**, which may comprise a frac plug, a bridge plug, a packer, or another type of well bore zonal isolation device, for example, as it is being lowered to a predetermined depth within the well bore **120** to perform a specific operation. The drilling rig **110** is conventional and therefore includes a motor driven winch and other associated equipment for extending the work string **118** into the well bore **120** to position the consumable downhole tool **100** at the desired depth.

[0016] While the exemplary operating environment depicted in FIG. **1** refers to a stationary drilling rig **110** for lowering and setting the consumable downhole tool **100** within a land-based well bore **120**, one of ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate that mobile workover rigs, well servicing units, such as slick lines and e-lines, and the like, could also be used to lower the tool **100** into the well bore **120**. It should be understood that the consumable downhole tool **100** may also be used in other operational environments, such as within an offshore well bore.

[0017] The consumable downhole tool **100** may take a variety of different forms. In an embodiment, the tool **100** comprises a plug that is used in a well stimulation/fracturing operation, commonly known as a "frac plug." FIG. **2** depicts an exemplary consumable frac plug, generally designated as **200**, as it is being lowered into a well bore **120** on a work string **118** (not shown). The frac plug **200** comprises an elongated tubular body member **210** with an axial flowbore **205** extending therethrough. A ball **225** acts as a one-way check valve. The ball **225**, when seated on an upper surface **207** of the flowbore **205**, acts to seal off the flowbore **205** and prevent flow downwardly therethrough, but permits flow upwardly through the flowbore **205**. In some embodiments, an option cage, although not included in FIG. **2**, may be formed at the upper end of the tubular body member **210** to retain ball **225**. A packer element assembly **230** extends around the tubular body member **210**. One or more slips **240** are mounted around the body member **210**, above and below the packer assembly **230**. The slips **240** are guided by mechanical slip bodies **245**. A cylindrical torch **257** is shown inserted into the axial flowbore **205** at the lower end of the body member **210** in the frac plug **200**. The torch **257** comprises a fuel load **251**, a firing mechanism **253**, and a torch body **252** with a plurality of nozzles **255** distributed along the length of the torch body **252**. The nozzles **255** are angled to direct flow exiting the nozzles **255** towards the inner surface **211** of the tubular body member **210**. The firing mechanism **253** is attached near the base of the torch body **252**. An annulus **254** is provided between the torch body **252** and the inner surface **211** of the tubular body member **210**, and the annulus **254** is enclosed by the ball **225** above and by the fuel load **251** below.

[0018] At least some of the components comprising the frac plug **200** may be formed from consumable materials, such as metals, for example, that burn away and/or lose structural integrity when exposed to heat and an oxygen source. Such consumable components may be formed of any consumable material that is suitable for service in a downhole environment and that provides adequate strength to enable proper operation of the frac plug **200**. By way of example only, one such material is magnesium metal. In operation, these components may be exposed to heat and oxygen via flow exiting the nozzles **255** of the torch body **252**. As such, consumable components nearest these nozzles **255** will burn first, and then the burning extends outwardly to other consumable components.

[0019] Any number or combination of frac plug **200** components may be made of consumable materials. In an embodiment, the load bearing components of the frac plug **200**, including the tubular body member **210**, the slips **240**, the mechanical slip bodies **245**, or a combination thereof, may comprise consumable material, such as magnesium metal. These load bearing components **210**, **240**, **245** hold the frac plug **200** in place during well stimulation/fracturing operations. If these components **210**, **240**, **245** are burned and/or consumed due to exposure to heat and oxygen, they will lose structural integrity and crumble under the weight of the remaining plug **200** components, or when subjected to other well bore forces, thereby causing the frac plug **200** to fall away into the well bore **120**. In another embodiment, only the tubular body member **210** is made of consumable material, and consumption of that body member **210** sufficiently compromises the structural integrity of the frac plug **200** to cause it to fall away into the well bore **120** when the frac plug **200** is exposed to heat and oxygen.

[0020] The fuel load **251** of the torch **257** may be formed from materials that, when ignited and burned, produce heat and an oxygen source, which in turn may act as the catalysts for initiating burning of the consumable components of the frac plug **200**. By way of example only, one material that produces heat and oxygen when burned is thermite, which comprises iron oxide, or rust (Fe_2O_3), and aluminum metal power (Al). When ignited and burned, thermite reacts to produce aluminum oxide (Al_2O_3) and liquid iron (Fe), which is a molten plasma-like substance. The chemical reaction is:

$$Fe_2O_3+2Al(s)\rightarrow Al_2O_3(s)+2Fe(l)$$

The nozzles **255** located along the torch body **252** are constructed of carbon and are therefore capable of withstanding the high temperatures of the molten plasma substance without melting. However, when the consumable components of the frac plug **200** are exposed to the molten plasma, the components formed of magnesium metal will react with the oxygen in the aluminum oxide (Al_2O_3), causing the magnesium metal to be consumed or converted into magnesium oxide (MgO), as illustrated by the chemical reaction below:

$$3Mg+Al_2O_3\rightarrow 3MgO+2Al$$

When the magnesium metal is converted to magnesium oxide, a slag is produced such tat the component no longer has structural integrity and thus cannot carry load. Application of a slight load, such as a pressure fluctuation or pressure pulse, for example, may cause a component made of magnesium oxide slag to crumble. In an embodiment, such loads are applied to the well bore and controlled in such a manner so as to cause structural failure of the frac plug **200**.

[0021] In one embodiment, the torch **257** may comprise the "Radial Cutting Torch", developed and sold by MCR Oil Tools Corporation. The Radial Cutting Torch includes a fuel load **251** constructed of thermite and classified as a flammable, nonexplosive solid. Using a nonexplosive material like thermite provides several advantages. Numerous federal regulations regarding the safety, handling and transportation of explosives add complexity when conveying explosives to an operational job site. In contrast, thermite is nonexplosive and thus does not fall under these federal constraints. Torches **257** constructed of thermite, including the Radial Cutting Torch, may be transported easily, even by commercial aircraft.

[0022] In order to ignite the fuel load **251**, a firing mechanism **253** is employed that may be activated in a variety of ways. In one embodiment, a timer, such as an electronic timer, a mechanical timer, or a spring-wound timer, a volume timer, or a measured flow timer, for example, may be used to activate a heating source within the firing mechanism **253**. In one embodiment, an electronic timer may activate a heating source when pre-defined conditions, such as time, pressure and/or temperature are met. In another embodiment, the electronic timer may activate the heat source purely as a function of time, such as after several hours or days. In still another embodiment, the electronic timer may activate when pre-defined temperature and pressure conditions are met, and after a specified time period has elapsed. In an alternate embodiment, the firing mechanism **253** may not employ time at all. Instead, a pressure actuated firing head that is actuated by differential pressure or by a pressure pulse may be used. It is contemplated that other types of devices may also be used. Regardless of the means for activating the firing mechanism **253**, once activated, the firing mechanism **253** generates enough heat to ignite the fuel load **251** of the torch **257**. In one embodiment, the firing mechanism **253** comprises the "Thermal Generator", developed and sold by MCR Oil Tools Corporation, which utilizes an electronic timer. When the electronic timer senses that pre-defined conditions have been met, such as a specified time has elapsed since setting the timer, a single AA battery activates a heating filament capable of generating enough heat to ignite the fuel load **251**, causing it to burn. To accelerate consumption of the frac plug **200**, a liquid or powder-based accelerant may be provided inside the annulus **254**. In various embodiments, the accelerant may be liquid manganese acetate, nitromethane, or a combination thereof

[0023] In operation, the frac plug **200** of FIG. **2** may be used in a well stimulation/fracturing operation to isolate the zone of the formation F below the plug **200**. Referring now to FIG. **3**, the frac plug **200** of FIG. **2** is shown disposed between producing zone A and producing zone B in the formation F. As depicted, the frac plug **200** comprises a torch **257** with a fuel load **251** and a firing mechanism **253**, and at least one consumable material component such as the tubular body member **210**. The slips **240** and the mechanical slip bodies **245** may also be made of consumable material, such as magnesium metal. In a conventional well stimulation/fracturing operation, before setting the frac plug **200** to isolate zone A from zone B, a plurality of perforations **300** are made by a perforating tool (not shown) through the casing **125** and cement **127** to extend into producing zone A. Then a well stimulation fluid is introduced into the well bore **120**, such as by lowering a tool (not shown) into the well bore **120** for discharging the fluid at a relatively high pressure or by pumping the fluid directly from the surface **105** into the well bore **120**. The well stimulation fluid passes through the perforations **300** into producing zone A of the formation F for stimulating the recovery of fluids in the form of oil and gas containing hydrocarbons. These production fluids pass from zone A, through the perforations **300**, and up the well bore **120** for recovery at the surface **105**.

[0024] Prior to running the frac plug **200** downhole, the firing mechanism **253** is set to activate a heating filament when predefined conditions are met. In various embodiments, such predefined conditions may include a predetermined period of time elapsing, a specific temperature, a specific pressure, or any combination thereof. The amount of time set may depend on the length of time required to perform the well stimulation/fracturing operation. For example, if the operation is estimated to be performed in 12 hours, then a timer may be set to activate the heating filament after 12 hours have elapsed. Once the firing mechanism **253** is set, the frac plug **200** is then lowered by the work string **118** to the desired depth within the well bore **120**, and the packer clement assembly **230** is set against the casing **125** in a conventional manner, thereby isolating zone A as depicted in FIG. **3**. Due to the design of the frac plug **200**, the ball **225** will unseal the flowbore **205**, such as by unseating from the surface **207** of the flowbore **205**; for example, to allow fluid from isolated zone A to flow upwardly through the frac plug **200**. However, the ball **225** will seal off the flowbore **205**, such as by seating against the surface **207** of the flowbore **205**, for example, to prevent flow downwardly into the isolated zone A. Accordingly, the production fluids from zone A continue to pass through the perforations **300** into the well bore **120**, and upwardly through the flowbore **205** of the frac plug **200**, before flowing into the well bore **120** above the frac plug **200** for recovery at the surface **105**.

[0025] After the frac plug **200** is set into position as shown in FIG. **3**, a second set of perforations **310** may then be formed through the casing **125** and cement **127** adjacent intermediate producing zone B of the formation F. Zone B is then treated with well stimulation fluid, causing the recovered fluids from zone B to pass through the perforations **310** into the well bore **120**. In this area of the well bore **120** above the frac plug **200**, the recovered fluids from zone B will mix with the recovered fluids from zone A before flowing upwardly within the well bore **120** for recovery at the surface **105**.

[0026] If additional well stimulation/fracturing operations will be performed, such as recovering hydrocarbons from zone C, additional frac plugs **200** may be installed within the well bore **120** to isolate each zone of the formation F. Each frac plug **200** allows fluid to flow upwardly therethrough from the lowermost zone A to the uppermost zone C of the formation F, but pressurized fluid cannot flow downwardly through the frac plug **200**.

[0027] After the fluid recovery operations are complete, the frac plug **200** must be removed from the well bore **120**. In this context, as stated above, at least some of the components of the frac plug **200** are consumable when exposed to heat and an oxygen source, thereby eliminating the need to mill or drill the frac plug **200** from the well bore **120**. Thus, by exposing the frac plug **200** to heat and an oxygen source, at least some of its components will be consumed, causing the frac plug **200** to release from the casing **125**, and the unconsumed components of the plug **200** to fall to the bottom of the well bore **120**.

[0028] In order to expose the consumable components of the frac plug **200** to heat and an oxygen source, the fuel load **351** of the torch **257** may be ignited to burn. Ignition of the fuel load **251** occurs when the firing mechanism **253** powers the heating filament. The heating filament, in turn, produces enough heat to ignite the fuel load **251**. Once ignited, the fuel load **251** burns, producing high-pressure molten plasma that is emitted from the nozzles **255** and directed at the inner surface **211** of he tubular body member **210**. Through contact of the molten plasma with the inner surface **211**, the tubular body member **210** is burned and/or consumed. In an embodiment, the body member **210** comprises magnesium metal that is converted to magnesium oxide through contact with the molten plasma. Any other consumable components, such as the slips **240** and the mechanical slip bodies **245**, may be consumed in a similar fashion. Once the structural integrity of the frac plug **200** is compromised due to consumption of its load carrying components, the frac plug **200** falls away into the well bore **120**, and in some embodiments, the frac plug **200** may further be pumped out of the well bore **120**, if desired.

[0029] In the method described above, removal of the frac plug **200** was accomplished without surface intervention. However, surface intervention may occur should the frac plug **200** fail to disengage and, under its own weight, fall away into the well bore **120** after exposure to the molten plasma produced by the burning torch **257**. In that event, another tool, such as work string **118**, may be run downhole to push against the frac plug **200** until it disengages and falls away into the well bore **120**. Alternatively, a load may be applied to the frac plug **200** by pumping fluid or by pumping another tool into the well bore **120**, thereby dislodging the frac plug **200** and/or aiding the structural failure thereof.

[0030] Surface intervention may also occur in the event that the firing mechanism **253** fails to activate the heat source. Referring now to FIG. **4**, in that scenario, an alternate firing mechanism **510** may be tripped into the well bore **120**. A slick line **500** or other type of work string may be employed to lower the alternate firing mechanism **510** near the frac plug **200**. In an embodiment, using its own internal timer, this alternate firing mechanism **510** may activate to ignite the torch **257** contained within the frac plug **200**. In another embodiment, the frac plug **200** may include a fuse running from the upper end of the tubular body member **210**, for example, down to the fuel load **251**, and the alternate firing mechanism **510** may ignite the fuse, which in turn ignites the torch **257**.

[0031] In still other embodiments, the torch **257** may be unnecessary. As an alternative, a thermite load may be positioned on top of the frac plug **200** and ignited using a firing mechanism **253**. Molten plasma produced by the burning thermite may then burn down through the frac plug **200** until the structural integrity of the plug **200** is compromised and the plug **200** falls away downhole.

[0032] Removing a consumable downhole tool **100**, such as the frac plug **200** described above, from the well bore **120** is expected to be more cost effective and less time consuming than removing conventional downhole tools, which requires making one or more trips into the well bore **120** with a mill or drill to gradually grind or cut the tool away. The foregoing descriptions of specific embodiments of the consumable downhole tool **100**, and the systems and methods for removing the consumable downhole tool **100** from the well bore **120** have been presented for purposes of illustration and description and are not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed. Obviously many other modifications and variations are possible. In particular, the type of consumable downhole tool **100**, or the particular components that make up the downhole tool **100** could be varied. For example, instead of a frac plug **200**, the consumable downhole tool **100** could comprise a bridge plug, which is designed to seal the well bore **120** and isolate the zones above and below the bridge plug, allowing no fluid communication in either direction. Alternatively, the consumable downhole tool **100** could comprise a packer tat includes a shiftable valve such that the packer may perform like a bridge plug to isolate two formation zones, or the shiftable valve may be opened to enable fluid communication therethrough.

[0033] While various embodiments of the invention have been shown and described herein, modifications may be made by one skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and the teachings of the invention. The embodiments described here are exemplary only, and are not intended to be limiting. Many variations, combinations, and modifications of the invention disclosed herein are possible and are within the scope of the invention. Accordingly, the scope of protection is not limited by the description set out above, but is defined by the claims which follow, that scope including all equivalents of the subject matter of the claims.

What we claim as our invention is:

1. A downhole tool having a body or structural component comprising a material that is at least partially consumed when exposed to heat and a source of oxygen.

2. The downhole tool of claim **1** wherein the material comprises a metal.

3. The downhole tool of claim **2** wherein the metal is magnesium.

4. The downhole tool of claim **3** wherein the magnesium metal is converted to magnesium oxide when exposed to heat and a source of oxygen.

5. The downhole tool of claim **1** further comprising a torch with a fuel load that produces the heat and source of oxygen when burned.

6. The downhole tool of claim **5** wherein the fuel load comprises a flammable, non-explosive solid.

7. The downhole tool of claim **5** wherein the fuel load comprises thermite.

8. The downhole tool of claim **5** wherein the torch farther comprises a torch body with a plurality of nozzles distributed along its length.

9. The downhole tool of claim **8** wherein the nozzles distribute molten plasma produced when the fuel load is burned.

10. The downhole tool of claim **5** wherein the torch further comprises a firing mechanism with heat source to ignite the fuel load.

11. The downhole tool of claim **10** wherein the firing mechanism further comprises a device to activate the heat source.

12. The downhole tool of claim **10**, wherein the firing mechanism is an electronic igniter.

13. The downhole tool of claim **11** wherein the device comprises an electronic timer, a mechanical timer, a spring-wound timer, a volume timer, or a measured flow timer.

14. The downhole tool of claim **13** wherein the timer is programmable to activate the heat source when pre-defined conditions are met.

15. The downhole tool of claim **14** wherein the pre-defined conditions comprise elapsed time, temperature, pressure, volume, or any combination thereof.

16. The downhole tool of claim **11** wherein the device comprises a pressure-actuated firing head.

17. The downhole tool of claim **1** further comprising an enclosure for storing an accelerant.

18. The downhole tool of claim **1** wherein the tool is a frac plug.

19. The downhole tool of claim **1** wherein the tool is a bridge plug.

20. The downhole tool of claim **1** wherein the tool is a packer.

* * * * *