

THIS OPINION WAS NOT WRITTEN FOR PUBLICATION

The opinion in support of the decision being entered today (1) was not written for publication in a law journal and (2) is not binding precedent of the Board.

Paper No. 27

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

BEFORE THE BOARD OF PATENT APPEALS
AND INTERFERENCES

Ex parte GREGORY K. WILLIAMS and SEAN A. BRADY

Appeal No. 1997-4002
Application 08/459,880¹

HEARD: December 7, 1999

Before FRANKFORT, STAAB and GONZALES, Administrative Patent Judges.

STAAB, Administrative Patent Judge.

DECISION ON APPEAL

This is a decision on an appeal from the examiner's final rejection of claims 25-27, 29 and 32-35. Claims 28, 30 and

¹ Application for patent filed June 2, 1995. According to the appellants, the application is a division of Application 08/252,125, filed June 1, 1994, now abandoned; which is a continuation of Application 08/050,942, filed April 21, 1993, now abandoned.

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31, the only other remaining claims in the application, have been

withdrawn from further consideration under 37 CFR § 1.142(b) as not being readable on the elected species.^{2,3}

By way of background, the appealed subject matter in the present application is related to the appealed subject matter in Appeal No. 1998-1647 in appellants' copending application 08/668,503, which appeal is decided currently herewith.

Appellants' invention pertains to a patch bag, that is, a bag having a patch applied to one of its surfaces to increase its resistance to puncture. As explained on page 1 of appellants' specification, the invention is designed for the packaging of bone-in cuts of meat. In this environment, the patch prevents or reduces the likelihood that a bone will completely puncture or rupture the bag and patch combination. According to appellants, the edge portion of the bag is

² The requirement for election was made in Paper No. 6 of parent application 08/252,125.

³ An amendment filed concurrently with the answer correcting a minor deficiency in claim 25 have been entered. See page 2 of the answer.

particularly vulnerable to puncture in the packaging of certain cuts of bone-in meat. Accordingly, an objective of appellants' invention is to provide a patch bag wherein the patch "may fold around the edge of the

bag in [its] lay flat position" (specification, page 5) to provide increased protection against puncture at this location. Appellants disclose on pages 8-10 of the specification a method of making a patch bag having a patch that folds around an edge of the bag.⁴ This method may be used to make end-seal patch bags (see Figure 3) wherein the end of the bag is sealed and a patch 8 folds around a side edge of the bag. The disclosed method may also be used to make side-seal bags (see Figure 4) where the sides of the bag are sealed and a patch 8 folds around a bottom end of the bag. The appealed claims of the present application are directed to a side-seal bag, i.e., a bag of the type illustrated in Figure 4. Independent claim 25, a copy of which is found in an

⁴Said method is the subject of appellants' U.S. Patent 5,540,646, based on application 08/407,793, a division of application 08/050,942. The '942 application is the grandparent of the present application.

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appendix to the brief, is illustrative of the appealed subject matter.

The references of record relied upon by the examiner in support of a rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 103 are:

Schirmer	4,606,922	Aug. 19, 1986
Ferguson	4,765,857	Aug. 23, 1988

Claims 25-27, 29 and 32-35 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 as being unpatentable over Ferguson in view of Schirmer.⁵

The rejection is explained in the examiner's answer (Paper No. 16, mailed April 28, 1997).

The opposing viewpoints of appellants are set forth in the brief (Paper No. 14, filed March 28, 1997).

Independent claim 25 calls for a side-seal bag having a patch "covering at least a segment of the bottomline" of the bag. Claim 34, the only other independent claim on appeal, contains identical language. The examiner concedes that

⁵The final rejection (Paper No. 10) also included rejections of the appealed claims under 35 U.S.C. § 112, first and second paragraphs. However, the examiner has withdrawn these rejections. See page 3 of the answer.

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Ferguson does not meet this claim limitation ("Ferguson's patches do not cover at least a segment of the bottomline."

(answer, page 3)). The examiner contends, however, that

the Ferguson patent provides evidence that one of ordinary skill in the art, at the time the invention was made, was aware of the problem of meat bones puncturing the material of the heat shrinkable bags in which they were packaged. See Ferguson at col. 1, lines 15-23. In addition, an artisan was aware that the solution to the problem was attaching patches to the bags in the locations subject to being punctured.

See Ferguson at col. 1, lines 35-38. Thus, the general knowledge of one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made provides the suggestion or motivation to modify Ferguson's bag as set out in the rejection. [Answer, page 7.]

Based on the above, the examiner considers that it would have been obvious

to extend one of Ferguson's patches to cover at least a segment of the bottomline of the bag because one of ordinary skill in the art, knowing that a patch on a bone-in meat bag prevents the bag from being punctured, would have sought to cover any vulnerable area with a patch, including the bottomline of the bag. [Answer, page 5.]

Implicit in the above is the examiner's position that the patch bag of Ferguson, modified in the manner proposed, would

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correspond to the claimed subject matter in all respects.

We have carefully reviewed the appealed claims, appellants' specification, the applied references, and the respective viewpoints of appellants and the examiner. As a consequence of our review, we conclude that the standing § 103 rejection is not sustainable.

Rejections based on 35 U.S.C. § 103 must rest on a factual basis. *In re Warner*, 379 F.2d 1011, 1017, 154 USPQ 173, 177-78 (CCPA 1967), *cert. denied*, 389 U.S. 1057 (1968). In making such a rejection, the examiner has the initial duty of supplying the requisite factual basis and may not, because of doubts that the invention is patentable, resort to speculation, unfounded assumptions or hindsight reconstruction to supply deficiencies in the factual basis. *Id.*

We fully appreciate that in Ferguson, the patch 8 is sized such that it covers and protects a substantial portion of one or both sides of a flattened, lay-flat bag (column 3, lines 6-10). While Ferguson's patch 8 approaches the edges of the bag in its flattened lay-flat position, it is clear that it does not in any sense cover an edge of the lay-flat bag.

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Concerning Schirmer, the examiner does not contend, and it is not apparent to us, that this reference makes up for the above noted deficiency in Ferguson. Thus, we conclude that the examiner has failed to advance any factual basis to support his conclusion that it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art to modify Ferguson in the manner proposed. The mere fact that Ferguson's patch could be extended up to or past the bottomline of the bag does not suffice. See *In re Gordon*, 733 F.2d 900, 902, 221 USPQ 1125, 1127 (Fed. Cir. 1984) (the circumstance that the prior art *could* be modified to meet a claim would not have made the modification obvious unless the prior art suggested the desirability of the modification). Here, neither Ferguson nor Schirmer contains a suggestion for the modification proposed by the examiner.⁶

⁶In this regard, the examiner's reliance on case law such as *In re Shepard*, 319 F.2d 194, 138 USPQ 148 (CCPA 1963); *In re Jacoby*, 309 F.2d 513, 135 USPQ 317 (CCPA 1962); and *In re Bozek*, 416 F.2d 1385, 163 USPQ 545 (CCPA 1969) to fill this gap in the evidentiary basis for the rejection is not

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Furthermore, Ferguson provides no guidance whatsoever as to how the patch is applied to the bag. Hence, even if the patch of Ferguson were extended up to or past the bottomline of the bag as proposed by the examiner, it is not apparent to us that the extended patch would necessarily "cover" at least a segment of the bottomline, as called for in each of the independent claims on appeal. Stated differently, even if the proposed modification of Ferguson were to be made, it is not clear to us that the claimed subject matter would result, the examiner's view to the contrary notwithstanding.

In light of the above, we will not sustain the standing 35 U.S.C. § 103 rejection of claims 25-27, 29 and 32-35 as being unpatentable over Ferguson in view of Schirmer.

The decision of the examiner is reversed.

REVERSED

sufficient.

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