APPLICATION FOR PATENT

Title: Full Bore Wellhead Load Shoulder and Support Ring

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The field of this invention is load rings and corresponding load shoulders in wellheads for support of hangers and other equipment and more particularly where a full bore is needed in the wellhead.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Wellheads are called upon for support of hangers, test plugs and other equipment during drilling and completion phases in a well. Typically the wellhead will have a support shoulder and a reduced bore so that lowering the hanger past a certain point will cause the hanger to become supported. In some designs, multiple shoulders with the same diameter are used to reduce the load applied to each one. A load ring having multiple bearing areas is used in conjunction with these multiple support shoulders to support the hanger off the wellhead.

[0003] Some of the problems with such designs are the difficulty in machining to close tolerance a combination of multiple shoulders and a load ring having a similar profile so that when the load is applied, it is divided equally between the multiple load shoulders. Another problem with designs that require reduction in bore size is that it is not possible to advance the hanger past the support point without latching into the support shoulder. In situation where the hanger must be advanced beyond the support shoulder and later raised up and only then supported, the reduced bore designs are not effective. The reduced bore designs are also costly because they require over-sizing the wellhead in order to have the requisite minimum bore diameter in it. Even in designs that use a single load surface in the wellhead, problems

arise in design of a load ring that could expand to the required dimensions without distortion while still being strong enough to carry the applied load. In some designs the groove into which the expanding load ring was destined to enter did not provide adequate guidance to deal with bending or twisting that could occur as the diameter was increased. In other designs the load ring on the hanger was left unprotected during run in and left exposed to potential physical damage before it was urged into the supporting position. In other designs voids are added to the load ring that is intended to be sprung into a groove in the wellhead in a manner that can weaken the ability of the ring to resist bending and torsional forces that can occur during its release into the wellhead grove and subsequent loading applied from the hanger weight. Some designs only use sloping contact shoulders that maximize radial load components and promote distortion of the load ring as its diameter grows.

[0004] Some examples of prior designs that include one or more of the above stated shortcomings can be seen in U.S. Patents 5,839,512; 4,295,665; 5,209,521; 5,984,008; 6,202,745 B1; 6,598,673 B1 and 3,420,308.

[0005] The present invention seeks to address these issues with a design that is simple to manufacture and repair and provides full bore access in the wellhead. It features an energizing taper and a limit shoulder that share the load. The receiving groove is shaped to anticipate the potential distortions in the ring as its diameter is increased and bring the ring back to shape. The receiving groove, at its depth is designed to encounter the ring to lend further guidance and support. The load can be shared between the energizing taper and the limit shoulder. The ring can also be made from a high strength low modulus material to enhance load carrying capability while permitting spanning of larger radial distances. Various designs are contemplated including C-rings and segmented rings where the segments

are held to each other in a variety of ways. Those skilled in the art will more readily appreciate the various aspects of the invention from a description of the preferred embodiment and the claims, which appear below.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] A full bore support system for a hanger or other equipment in a wellhead features a support groove in the wellhead that can be integrally made or on an insert. A support ring can have a variety of configuration and features an energizing surface and a limit surface that ultimately share the load. The receiving groove is configured to guide the support ring as it expands to minimize bending and distortion. The support ring is recessed and protected until it is actuated outwardly into a supporting position. A high strength low modulus material is preferred to withstand the radial expansion and the applied loads and environmental conditions. Various shapes for the ring are contemplated including a C-ring and a ring made from segments movable with respect to each other.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] Figure 1 is a section view of the wellhead with the stop pins extended and the energizing ring about to start pushing the load ring up the energizing taper;

[0008] Figure 2 is similar to Figure 1 except that the retaining ring is shear pinned to the energizing ring;

[0009] Figure 3 is the view of Figure 1 showing some movement of the load ring up the energizing taper;

[0010] Figure 4 is the view of Figure 3 showing the load ring having moved up away from the energizing ring supported by the stop pins to the nearly set position in the recess comprising the load shoulder;

[0011] Figure 5 is the view of Figure 4 showing the fully set position of the load ring;

[0012] Figure 6 is a section through the load ring showing how it can bend or twist as its diameter is increased through movement on the energizing taper;

[0013] Figure 7 is a plan view of the load ring shown in section in Figure 6 and illustrating how the load ring can bend as its diameter is increased;

[0014] Figure 8 shows how an offset in position of the hanger is compensated for in the design of the present invention;

[0015] Figure 9 is a detailed view, in section of the load ring set in its receiving groove in the wellhead;

[0016] Figures 10 and 10a show an embodiment of a segmented load ring in the contracted and expanded positions, respectively;

[0017] Figures 11 and 12 are two views of an alternative design for a segmented load ring showing an outer band holding the segments together;

[0018] Figures 13 and 14 show an alternative embodiment to Figures 10 and 10a in the retracted and expanded positions, respectively.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0019] Referring to Figure 1, the wellhead **10** has a bore **12** that remains constant in the region shown. One or more stop pins **14** are in respective bores **16** and sealed with seals **18**. The hanger or other device to be suspended **20** has a retaining ring **22** attached at thread **24**. An energizing ring **26** rests on ring **22** and pins **14** when the hanger **20** is lowered in wellhead **10** to the position shown in Figure 1. Wellhead **10** also has a recess **28** in which a ring **30** is fitted and secured in recess **28** with a split ring retainer **32**. Ring **30** has a groove **34** defined by surfaces **36, 38** and **40**. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that groove **34** can be

integral to the wellhead **10** as an option. Using the ring **30** to create the groove **34**, whose peak coincides with bore **12**, allows the ring **30** to be replaced if the groove **34** becomes worn or damaged over time. The hanger **20** features an energizing taper **42** and an adjacent limit shoulder **44** which can be flat, as shown in Figure 1 or sloping downwardly in a direction toward centerline **46**, as shown in Figure 9. In some situations a slight angle may be desirable to reduce or more uniformly distribute stresses in the load support area. An inherent benefit of this design is to prevent accumulation of debris.

[0020] As shown in Figure 1, the expanding load shoulder **48** has a top surface **50** that will ultimately engage shoulder **44**. Surfaces **52, 54** and **56** correspond to surfaces **36, 38** and **40** of groove **34** such that when load shoulder **48** is forced along taper **42** there results a close fit on the respective trio of surfaces as between the groove **34** and the load shoulder **48** as will be described later in more detail.

[0021] Figure 2 is similar to Figure 1 with the exception that energizing ring **26** is retained to retaining ring **22** by at least one shear pin **58** which eventually breaks as the hanger **20** is advanced with stop pins **14** extended.

[0022] Figure 3 shows the continuing sequence of movement. In Figure 3 the load shoulder **48** has been advanced part way up the taper **42** but it still bears on the energizing ring **26**. At this point surface **54** has begun to protrude beyond shoulder **44**, which had been previously protecting it from mechanical impacts during earlier operations. At this point, the energizing ring **26** is suspended by the pins **14** and not by ring **22**.

[0023] Figure 4 shows a nearly set position that results from further downward movement of the hanger **20** with pins **14** extended. Surface **50** has yet to be engaged circumferentially by shoulder **44**. However, load shoulder **48** has been sufficiently radially expanded so that it has

moved up and away from energizing ring **26**. This upward movement is caused by surface **52** moving along inclined surface **36**. The trio of surfaces on the load shoulder **48** has moved closer to their corresponding surfaces that define the groove **34**. Indeed at some points along the circumference there may be guiding contact to help hold the load shoulder ring **48** against bending out of a plane perpendicular to axis **46** or against torsional distortion about its circumferential axis, as will later be described with respect to Figures 6 and 7.

[0024] Figure 5 illustrated the fully set position. Note that surface **60** on ring **48** is still engaged by taper **42**. The top surface **50** is against shoulder **44**.Preferably continuous contact in groove **34** occurs as between the surfaces **52, 54** and **54** and the respective groove surfaces **36, 38** and **40**. This close fit prevents bending and torsional deformation of the load shoulder ring **48** despite the radially outward deflection resulting from use of a single groove **34** for support of the hanger **20**. Note that the load of the hanger **20** is supported from adjacent surfaces **50** and **60** on the load shoulder ring **48**.

[0025] Figure 6 illustrates how groove **34** engages load shoulder ring **48** as ring **48** is expanded along taper **42**. The ring **48** can twist about its own central axis but the configuration of the groove **34** holds and moves it back toward its original plane and resists the torsional forces in part induced by bending during expansion to facilitate the assumption of the final position shown in Figure 5. Prior designs could fail if they allow the bending and/ or twisting of the load ring to become great enough which could prevent the preferred situation of uniform circumferential flush contact and thus create areas of high localized stress that can lead to deformation of ring **48** and to failure to support the hanger **20**.

[0026] Figure 7 illustrates a C-ring shape to load shoulder ring **48** as viewed from above when its diameter is increasing and gap **62** is opening up. For ease of description gap **62** is

referred to as being located at 180°. It can be seen that as the gap **62** increases, the most bending occurs at the 0° position. This location also experiences some twisting in torsion as the ring **48** responds to stresses imposed on it from an increase in its diameter. The fact that inside surface **64** becomes visible from the overhead view of Figure 7 during the radial expansion, illustrates the tendency to bend and/or twist graphically. The close fit in groove **34** particularly the intended full bottom contact at surface **38** in the depth of groove **34** resists these tendencies so as to assure the intended load carrying capacity of ring **48** is achieved at the conclusion of the radial expansion.

[0027] A related phenomenon is shown in Figure 8. Here the hanger **20** has shifted to the left causing the load support ring **48** to bottom in groove **34** on the left side of the drawing while leaving a gap **66** on the right side of the drawing. The gap **66** would normally cause the ring **48** to want to bend or twist out of position but the close fit of groove **34** in conjunction with lateral force exerted on the hanger **20** from the contacting surfaces on the left side of the drawing again contain the ring **48** in the desired plane and resist its tendency to twist responsive to torsional stresses induced from bending during the forced radial expansion as the hanger **20** is set.

[0028] Figure 9 shows an inclined shoulder **44**, which is optional. This detailed view also shows the close fit inside groove **34** to ensure a good positioning of ring **48** for adequate support of the hanger **20**.

[0029] Figures 10 and 10a show a segmented ring **48** made of segments that are connected for relative movement with respect to each other by bolts **70** which limit the maximum diameter shown in Figure 10a. Between the segments are springs **72** to push the segments **68** apart to assume the position of Figure 10a if the segments **68** are no longer retained to the run

in diameter where shoulder **44** can protect them. The Figure 10 position can be retained by a band (not shown), which can be removed as the radius increases during the hang off procedure.

[0030] An alternative for a segmented ring **48** is shown in Figures 11 and 12. Here the segments **68** are held together for run in by a circumferential band **74**, which can be in the shape of a C-ring. The segments stay together as they are driven along taper **42** and then become trapped in groove **34** with the weight of the hanger **20** holding them in groove **34**. Yet a slight variation of the design of Figures 10 and 10a is the design illustrated in Figures 13 and 14. Here the springs **72** are mounted around the travel limit bolts **70** but for all intents and purposes, the operation of the load shoulder ring **48** of Figures 10 and 10a is similar to the version shown in Figures 13 and 14.

[0031] In the segmented designs, the outer surface **54** on each of the segments is made with a radius to conform closely to the depth of groove **34** defined by surface **38**. This results in a wavy appearance of the outer surface of the segmented ring **48** when it is in the run in position. However, after expansion, while the segments may have moved apart their outer surfaces more closely approximate the radius at the depth of the groove 34. This is done to promote better support by the segmented ring **48** of the tubular **20**. As previously stated the close proximity of these surfaces on expansion of the segmented ring **48** also helps control bending and twisting as the radius of the segmented ring **48** is increased.

[0032] Those skilled in the art will appreciate the various aspects of the present invention. The design allows run in with the ring **48** protected by shoulder **44**. The hanger or other device **20** can be lowered past groove **34** without a landing engagement to facilitate other operations before the hanger **20** is ready to be tensioned and supported. The bore **12** needs no

reduction in size to facilitate support of the hanger **20**. As a result a smaller wellhead **10** can be used with a given bore size to allow further cost savings to the operator. The load ring **48** can take a variety of configurations such as a C-ring or a segmented ring held together in a variety of ways. It should be noted that for the segmented designs shown in Figures 10-14 that the outer diameter of the segments is preferably close in dimension to the inside diameter of the groove **34** into which the segments will expand when the diameter is increased due to movement of the segments along taper **42**. By doing this, the groove **34** will be better able to retain the relative position of the segments with respect to each other after radial expansion and the weight of the string connected to the hanger **20** will be better supported. In the preferred embodiment, if the ring **48** were perfectly centered in groove **34** there would be a clearance of about .005 inches all around. In reality the ring **48** may wind up off center such that the gap between surfaces **54** and **38** could vary between about .002 and .008 inch. Although this clearance may vary a small amount due to tight tolerances on surfaces 54 and 38, centralization of the ring and subsequent equipment is the desired result. In the present invention the segmented ring design has the segments mounted to the hanger **20** and interacting with each other to support the hanger. This is to be contrasted with prior designs that had individual segments mounted to the wellhead that could be driven in to contact a hanger for support. The ring **48** regardless of its configuration in the present invention is guided by its mating groove **34** to resist bending or twisting under torsional stress that results from driving ring **48** along taper **42**. As noted above, such movement can cause a tendency to bend and/or twist which could result in permanent distortion and inadequate support. In the present invention, the mating groove **34** is designed to counteract such forces by relying on close clearances on a multiplicity of surfaces that gets ring **48** into its original shape and

orientation as its diameter is being increased. Specifically, contact is envisioned at surface 38 of groove 34 over a substantial portion of its surface area as the expansion is brought to the final diameter. Specifically, it is envisioned that the ring 48 will slide on hanger surface 42,possibly unevenly, and when this situation occurs the preferably tightly controlled surface 38 will assist in keeping ring 48 from twisting, bending or being deformed and help position it properly during the setting process. Ring 48 regardless of configuration is preferably constructed of a high strength low modulus metal preferably titanium. Not only does titanium provide the high strength but it also provides corrosion resistance particularly in wells where hydrogen sulfide is anticipated. Another feature is the load sharing of the entire axial load in the set position between the energizing taper 42 and the adjacent shoulder 44. Shoulder 44 can extend radially or be disposed at an angle, as shown in Figure 9 to allow debris in well fluids to run off.

[0033] The foregoing disclosure and description of the invention are illustrative and explanatory thereof, and various changes in the size, shape and materials, as well as in the details of the illustrated construction, may be made without departing from the invention and the claims below are intended to define the range of the invention.

We claim:

1. A support system for a tubular in a wellhead, comprising:

a tubular body having a support groove surrounding a bore therethrough; and

a tubular having a load member supported thereon in a run in position that allows said load member to pass said support groove without engagement therewith.

2. The support system of claim 1, wherein:

said bore is not reduced in diameter in the region adjacent said groove.

3. The support system of claim 1, wherein:

said body further comprises at least one extending member selectively extandable into said bore to engage said load member;

said tubular comprises an energizing taper to expand said load member toward said support groove.

4. The support system of claim 3, wherein:

said support groove moves said load member away from said extending member before said load member supports load of the tubular.

5. The support system of claim 1, wherein:

said support groove retains said load member against significant bending out of a plane perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of said bore as said load member is moved away from said run in position.

6. The support system of claim 1, wherein:

said support groove retains said load member against significant torsional bending about a circumferential axis of said load member as said load member is moved away from said run in position.

7. The support system of claim 1, wherein:

said support groove defines a bottom surface having a largest diameter;

said load member comprises an outermost surface, whereupon when said load member is moved away from said run in position to a load bearing position within said groove, said outer surface of said load member is advanced into sufficiently close proximity with said bottom surface so as to inhibit a tendency of said load member to bend out of a plane perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of said bore or to twist about a circumferential axis of said load member.

8. The support system of claim 7, wherein:

said bottom surface and said outermost surface approach within about .005 inch on average when said load member is in said load bearing position.

9. The support system of claim 3, wherein:

the tubular comprises a load surface adjacent said energizing taper and said load surface is disposed at an included angle away from said energizing taper at least as far as a plane perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of the tubular.

10. The support system of claim 1, wherein:

said load member comprised a segmented ring where the segments are movable with respect to each other to allow said ring to assume different diameters.

11. The support system of claim 10, wherein:

said support groove comprises a bottom surface having a first radius

said segments have an outer surface formed to a second radius that closely approximates said first radius

12. The support system of claim 11, wherein:

said segments are biased away from each other to a predetermined spacing.

13. The support system of claim **12**, wherein:

said segments are initially retained toward each other in said run in position.

14. A support system for a tubular in a wellhead, comprising:

a tubular body having a support groove surrounding a bore therethrough; and

a tubular having a load member supported thereon in a run in position;

said body further comprises at least one extending member selectively extandable into said bore to engage said load member;

said tubular comprises an energizing taper to expand said load member toward said support groove;

said support groove moves said load member away from said extending member before said load member supports load of the tubular.

15. A support system for a tubular in a wellhead, comprising:

a tubular body having a support groove surrounding a bore therethrough; and

a tubular having a load member supported thereon in a run in position;

said support groove retains said load member against significant bending out of a plane perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of said bore as said load member is moved away from said run in position.

16. A support system for a tubular in a wellhead, comprising:

a tubular body having a support groove surrounding a bore therethrough; and

a tubular having a load member supported thereon in a run in position;

said support groove retains said load member against significant torsional bending about a circumferential axis of said load member as said load member is moved away from said run in position.

17. A support system for a tubular in a wellhead, comprising:

a tubular body having a support groove surrounding a bore therethrough; and

a tubular having a load member supported thereon in a run in position;

said support groove defines a bottom surface having a largest diameter;

said load member comprises an outermost surface, whereupon when said load member is moved away from said run in position to a load bearing position within said groove, said outer surface of said load member is advanced into sufficiently close proximity with said bottom surface so as to inhibit a tendency of said load member to bend out of a plane perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of said bore or to twist about a circumferential axis of said load member.

18. A support system for a tubular in a wellhead, comprising:

a tubular body having a support groove surrounding a bore therethrough; and

a tubular having a load member supported thereon in a run in position;

said body further comprises at least one extending member selectively extandable into said bore to engage said load member;

said tubular comprises an energizing taper to expand said load member toward said support groove;

the tubular comprises a load surface adjacent said energizing taper and said load surface is disposed at an included angle away from said energizing taper at least as far as a plane perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of the tubular.

19. The support system of claim 1, wherein:

said support groove is formed on an insert removably mounted to said body.

20. The support system of claim 14, wherein:

said support groove is formed on an insert removably mounted to said body.