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PATENT SPECIFICATION

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(54) LETTER OPENER DEVICE

(71) I, BARRY LYNN BOSSHOLD, a Citizen of the United States of America, of 220 Atlantic No. 209, Santa Cruz, California, United States of America, do hereby declare the invention for which I pray that a patent may be granted to me, and the method by which it is to be performed, to be particularly described in and by the following statement:—

This invention relates to an improved letter opener device.

Conventional letter openers are in the nature of a knife or dagger to be inserted under the flap of a sealed envelope to sever the flap largely by tearing action. Of course, the blade could be made sharp enough to cut neatly through the flap, but such could present a hazard to the user. Consequently, most letter openers have an edge which is not really sharp enough to cut through the skin.

It is an object of this invention to provide a letter opener having a sharp blade which is adapted easily to cut through the flap of an envelope and yet which is not exposed to handling.

According to the invention there is provided a letter opener comprising a body provided with a non-cutting finger having a pointed distal end to be inserted under the flap of a sealed envelope and tapering gradually outward to a wider trailing portion displaced from said distal end and an elongated body portion joined to and carrying said finger in a junction therewith at said trailing portion and extending forwardly therefrom generally above and parallel to said finger; a sharp cutting blade extending upwardly from said finger towards said body portion at said trailing portion and facing toward said distal end; the side surfaces of said body forming a continuation of the side surfaces of said finger and flaring outward to an increased width rearward of said blade; and depending side members extending from a location above and forward of the distal end of the finger downwardly and rearwardly to embrace said finger and to restrict access to the blade while leaving the distal end and the bottom of said finger visually exposed, and said depending side

members having trailing edges occurring forward of the flared side surfaces of said body to leave a space for withdrawal of a severed envelope. By having the side surfaces of the body flare outward rearward of the blade the severed papers will be separated. Complementary depressions and raised portions may be formed on the sides of the finger and the inner sides of the depending side members, whereby the envelope flap and panel carried on opposite sides of the finger are pulled taut as they are engaged by the blade to facilitate cutting thereof.

The invention will be further described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is an elevational view, part broken away, of a letter opener embodying this invention and carried within a section of a writing pen;

Figure 2 is an elevational view of the letter opener itself;

Figure 3 is an elevational view of a blade for use in a preferred embodiment;

Figure 4 is a view in perspective of another embodiment of this invention; and

Figure 5 is a sectional view of the embodiment of Figure 4.

Referring now to Figures 1 to 3, there is shown a writing instrument 10, which may be a propelling pencil, a fountain pen, or as shown, a ball point pen, including a pocket clip 12, a ball point 14, and a point actuating button 16. Secured within the cap of the pen is the letter opener having a body 18.

The opener body 18 is provided with an elongated finger 20, the distal end 22 of which is pointed enough to enable it to be inserted into the small loop that is formed between a folded paper, e.g. under the flap of a conventional envelope (not shown) to be moved under the flap along the length of the envelope. Carried on the finger to extend upward therefrom is a razor-sharp blade 24 which will slice through the top of the flap as the finger moves across the envelope. Preferably, the blade 24 extends completely across the space between the finger and an overlying body portion 26.

When the letter opener 18 is in place in the cap of the ball point pen 10, the finger 20 is exposed through an opening 27 which is provided in the cap 28 of the pen 10, and extends therealong at least as far back as the cutting blade 24. Hence, the cap 28 forms a shield which embraces the blade 24 and finger 20 on both sides, leaving an opening between its depending side members 30 and 31 and the finger 20 which is too small to permit entry of a human finger. The depending side members 30 and 31 extend from a location above and forward of the distal end of the finger downwardly and rearwardly visually to expose the distal end and the bottom of the finger 20. Preferably one side 30 of the shield is somewhat shorter than the other 31 so that the user can more readily see the point 22 on the finger 20 to ensure proper engagement. In the preferred blade configuration shown in Figure 3, the blade cutting edge extends upwardly, first toward the trailing end of the finger and then forward, so as not to leave an acute angle between blade and body portion 26 in which paper particles could be wedged to build up and interfere with the cutting. Any suitable means, such as an adjustment screw passing through a hole 33 may be employed to hold the blade 24 in place on the finger 20. A slot 29 may be provided in the cap 28 to enable the letter opener body 18 to be press fitted and secured in place therein.

Figures 4 and 5 show an embodiment of the invention comprising a letter opener 34 provided as a separate, independent tool and, if desired, the body portion 36, with depending protective sides 38, and the penetrating finger 40 could be formed, as by moulding or casting, as an integral member. In addition, the blade 42 could be formed integrally with the finger and body portion or may be a separate member secured by any suitable means (not shown).

If desired, the depending side members 38 of the body portion and the sides of the finger could be formed with complementary ridges 44 and recesses 46 (Figure 5) so that the side members 38 could be squeezed slightly by the operator to pull the envelope panel and flap tightly down over the finger to prevent any yielding or folding of the paper, which might impair the cutting by the blade.

In the embodiment of Figure 1 the sides of the body 18 flare outward at 18' near the rear end of the paper receiving slots between the finger 20 and the depending side members 30 and 31 to merge smoothly with the outer surface of the pen 28 and in Figure 4 they flare outward at 48 whereby the severed papers will separate smoothly therealong to exit between it and the trailing end of the hood sides 38.

WHAT I CLAIM IS:—

1. A letter opener comprising a body provided with a non-cutting finger having a pointed distal end to be inserted under the flap of a sealed envelope and tapering gradually outward to a wider trailing portion displaced from said distal end and an elongated body portion joined to and carrying said finger in a junction therewith at said trailing portion and extending forwardly therefrom generally above and parallel to said finger; a sharp cutting blade extending upwardly from said finger towards said body portion at said trailing portion and facing toward said distal end; the side surfaces of said body forming a continuation of the side surfaces of said finger and flaring outward to an increased width rearward of said blade; and depending side members extending from a location above and forward of the distal end of the finger downwardly and rearwardly to embrace said finger and to restrict access to the blade while leaving the distal end and the bottom of said finger visually exposed, and said depending side members having trailing edges occurring forward of the flared side surfaces of said body to leave a space for withdrawal of a severed envelope.

2. A letter opener as claimed in claim 1, including complementary raised portions and depressions on the sides of the finger and the inner surfaces of the depending side members.

3. A letter opener as claimed in claim 1 or 2, including means releasably securing the blade on the body.

4. A letter opener as claimed in claim 1, 2 or 3, wherein the cutting edge of the blade is shaped to extend upward from the finger and first away from and then toward the distal end.

5. A letter opener as claimed in claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein the leading edge of one of the depending side members is so shaped as to expose one side of the distal end of the finger to facilitate placement of the finger beneath an envelope flap.

6. A letter opener as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the side members are integrally formed with said body portion.

7. A writing instrument incorporating a letter opener as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 5 with said side members comprising a portion of a section of the body of the writing instrument.

8. A writing instrument incorporating a letter opener constructed and arranged substantially as herein described with reference to or as illustrated in Figures 1 to 3 of the accompanying drawings.

9. A letter opener constructed and arranged substantially as herein described with reference to and as illustrated in Figures 4 and 5 of the accompanying drawings.

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When the letter opener 18 is in place in the cap of the ball point pen 10, the finger 20 is exposed through an opening 27 which is provided in the cap 28 of the pen 10, and extends therealong at least as far back as the cutting blade 24. Hence, the cap 28 forms a shield which embraces the blade 24 and finger 20 on both sides, leaving an opening between its depending side members 30 and 31 and the finger 20 which is too small to permit entry of a human finger. The depending side members 30 and 31 extend from a location above and forward of the distal end of the finger downwardly and rearwardly visually to expose the distal end and the bottom of the finger 20. Preferably one side 30 of the shield is somewhat shorter than the other 31 so that the user can more readily see the point 22 on the finger 20 to ensure proper engagement. In the preferred blade configuration shown in Figure 3, the blade cutting edge extends upwardly, first toward the trailing end of the finger and then forward, so as not to leave an acute angle between blade and body portion 26 in which paper particles could be wedged to build up and interfere with the cutting. Any suitable means, such as an adjustment screw passing through a hole 33 may be employed to hold the blade 24 in place on the finger 20. A slot 29 may be provided in the cap 28 to enable the letter opener body 18 to be press fitted and secured in place therein.

Figures 4 and 5 show an embodiment of the invention comprising a letter opener 34 provided as a separate, independent tool and, if desired, the body portion 36, with depending protective sides 38, and the penetrating finger 40 could be formed, as by moulding or casting, as an integral member. In addition, the blade 42 could be formed integrally with the finger and body portion or may be a separate member secured by any suitable means (not shown).

If desired, the depending side members 38 of the body portion and the sides of the finger could be formed with complementary ridges 44 and recesses 46 (Figure 5) so that the side members 38 could be squeezed slightly by the operator to pull the envelope panel and flap tightly down over the finger to prevent any yielding or folding of the paper, which might impair the cutting by the blade.

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2. A letter opener as claimed in claim 1, including complementary raised portions and depressions on the sides of the finger and the inner surfaces of the depending side members.

3. A letter opener as claimed in claim 1 or 2, including means releasably securing the blade on the body.

4. A letter opener as claimed in claim 1, 2 or 3, wherein the cutting edge of the blade is shaped to extend upward from the finger and first away from and then toward the distal end.

5. A letter opener as claimed in claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein the leading edge of one of the depending side members is so shaped as to expose one side of the distal end of the finger to facilitate placement of the finger beneath an envelope flap.

6. A letter opener as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the side members are integrally formed with said body portion.

7. A writing instrument incorporating a letter opener as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 5 with said side members comprising a portion of a section of the body of the writing instrument.

8. A writing instrument incorporating a letter opener constructed and arranged substantially as herein described with reference to or as illustrated in Figures 1 to 3 of the accompanying drawings.

9. A letter opener constructed and arranged substantially as herein described with reference to and as illustrated in Figures 4 and 5 of the accompanying drawings.



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