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SPECIFICATION

POWER SUPPLY SYSTEM FOR AN ELECTRIC DISCHARGE MACHINE

Technical Field

The present invention relates to a power supply system for use in an electric discharge machine (EDM). More specifically, it relates to a power supply system for use in a wire cut EDM which uses a traveling wire as a tool electrode and generates an electric discharge in the space between the wire electrode and a workpiece so as to machine a desired profile into the workpiece.

Background

Electric discharge machines are conventionally equipped with a power supply which supplies a series of controlled power pulses to the machining space -- the "gap" -- formed between the tool electrode and a conductive workpiece. The workpiece is positioned in a work tank, and the gap is filled with a dielectric fluid such as kerosene or de-ionized water having a high relative resistance. Application of a power pulse to the gap causes the dielectric fluid to ionize and an electric discharge to be generated when the voltage across the gap reaches a certain value. As a result, an electric discharge flows through the gap, and a small portion of the workpiece material vaporizes or fuses, after which it is washed away from the gap by the flow of dielectric fluid. In this way, small crater-like holes are formed in the surface of the workpiece. Insulation across the gap is restored at the cessation of each power pulse application. Electric discharge machining is a process for the precision manufacturing of parts, dies, etc. by generating many electric discharges across a gap while moving the tool electrode relative to the workpiece. It is appropriate for the machining of hard metals.



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Typically, a power pulse is produced by a power supply unit which is unavoidably positioned at a certain physical distance from the machine section parts which support the workpiece, and which include the mechanical parts for moving the tool electrode relative to the workpiece. The power supply unit is housed in a cabinet and includes an electrical part which produces the power pulses, as well as a control device which controls the amount of energy in a pulse, the pulse polarity, the pulse ON and OFF times, and the relative movement between the tool electrode and the workpiece. The power supply unit is connected to the machine section by appropriate conductors.

In a wire cutting electric discharge machine, a wire which travels between a pair of wire guides so as to be perpendicularly opposed to the workpiece is normally used as the tool electrode. During machining, as power pulses are applied across the gap and machining progresses, the traveling wire is moved relative to the workpiece in such a way that the axis of the traveling wire approaches the workpiece. When machining a desired profile into the workpiece, wire cut EDM machining is similar to conventional machining performed using a band saw blade.

It is known that during machining, when a wire under tension is traveling at a certain speed between the pair of wire guides, there is a slight vibration of the wire between wire guides. Because of this undesirable wire vibration, the portion of the workpiece which faces the wire is eroded unequally, more in the center than at the top and bottom surfaces, resulting in an adverse effect on product shape accuracy. Increasing the wire travel speed tends to improve wire straightness. Further, increasing the amount of energy supplied to the gap per unit time tends to reduce the amplitude of wire vibration caused by the pressure of the electric discharges on the wire. However, when power pulses having a small energy per pulse are required at the gap, reducing the amplitude of wire vibration may not be

sufficient. For example, after a given profile is roughly machined into the workpiece by moving the wire along a prescribed path, machining pulses having a small energy per power pulse are usually used for the so-called "second cut" to improve the roughness of the machined workpiece surface, during which the wire is moved over a path which is offset from the prescribed path. In order to restore sufficient insulation across the gap after each electric discharge is completed, the OFF time between power pulses cannot be made excessively short, so the ability to increase the frequency of the power pulses is limited.

The object of the present invention is to provide a power supply system for a wire cut electric discharge machine which increases the energy per unit time supplied to the gap by supplying a series of power pulses to the gap at a high repeating frequency, and as a result reduces wire vibration.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a power supply system for an electric discharge machine which improves machining efficiency by supplying a series of power pulses to the gap having a high repeating frequency.

A further object of the present invention is to supply a power supply system for an electric discharge machine capable of supplying power pulses of different amplitudes and repeating frequencies.

Other objects of the present invention will be partially described in the explanation which follows, and will be partially apparent to practitioners of the art through implementation of the invention.

Summary of the Invention

To achieve the above objects, the present invention provides an electric discharge machine power supply system.

(5) for machining a workpiece (3) by electric discharge by supplying a power pulse to a machining gap formed between a tool electrode and a workpiece, comprising:
a direct current power supply (8A);

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a pulse generating means (7) for generating a series of pulse signals having a controlled ON time and a controlled OFF time;

a switching element (8B) connected in series with the direct current power supply and responsive to said pulse signals for converting the direct current from the direct current power supply into direct current pulses;

a low inductance cable (11) for carrying the direct current pulses from the switching element to the vicinity of the machining gap, said low inductance cable comprising first and second conductors (11A, 11B), each having first and second ends the first ends of the first and second conductors being connected to the direct current power supply; and

a direct to alternating current converter positioned in the vicinity of the machining gap having an input and an output, the input being connected to the second ends of the first and second conductors, and the output being connected to the machining gap for delivering alternating current pulses to the machining gap.

The transformer preferably has a ring core, a primary winding wound around the ring core which is connected to one end of the cable, and a secondary winding wound around the ring core which is connected to the machining gap. Energy transmitted from the direct current power supply to the primary winding is passed to the secondary winding by electromagnetic induction.

Furthermore, it is preferable that the number of coil windings in the transformer be as few as possible.

The power supply system will also preferably include a means to electrically selectively bypass the conversion means so that direct current pulses from the direct current power supply can be caused to flow through the machining gap. The bypass means and conversion means may be housed together in a single case positioned in the vicinity of the machining gap.

Brief Description of the Drawings

FIG. 1 is a simplified block diagram illustrating a power supply system in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2A, FIG. 2B, FIG. 2C, FIG. 2D, FIG. 2E, FIG. 2F and FIG. 2G are timing charts illustrating voltage and current waveforms relating to the power supply system.

FIG. 3 is a simplified diagram illustrating a transformer for converting direct current to alternating current and the position of the case which houses the transformer and a transformer-bypass switch.

FIG. 4 is a simplified block diagram illustrating a circuit in the case shown in FIG. 3.

FIG. 5 is a section drawing illustrating one of the switches of FIG. 4 in detail.

FIG. 6 is a simplified block diagram illustrating a power supply system in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

Preferred Embodiment of the Invention

The present invention will now be described with reference to drawings. FIG. 1 depicts a power supply system for a wire cut electric discharge machine in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention which includes a machining unit and a power supply unit 5, which is positioned at a physical distance from the machining unit.

The machining unit includes a wire 1 which travels between a pair of wire guides 2A and 2B at a prescribed interval from a workpiece 3 which is attached to a work stand 4, the wire being positioned so as to face the workpiece 3 and held at a prescribed tension. The work stand 4 is mounted on an XY cross table (not illustrated) capable of moving in a plane which is perpendicular to the wire 1. Although not illustrated, the machining unit includes, for example, a mechanical part which causes the wire 1 to run from a wire

bobbin to the gap, and a part which introduces dielectric fluid to the gap.

The power supply unit 5 includes a direct current power supply 6A and a circuit 6 which includes a switching element 6B and a current limiting resistor 6C connected in series to the direct current power supply 6A. In order to make the explanation of the embodiment simpler and more apparent, only one direct current combination, made up of the switching element 6B and current limiting resistor 6C, is shown in the illustrated embodiment. In order to enable free selection of the value of the current which flows through the circuit 6, additional direct current combinations may be provided which are connected in parallel to the direct current combination and in series to the direct current power supply 6A. The circuit 6 further includes a reverse-current protection diode 6D, a switch 6E, and a diode 6F which protects the switching element 6B from surge currents.

The power supply unit 5 further includes a circuit 8 connected in parallel to the circuit 6, which comprises a variable direct current power supply 8A, a switching element 8B connected to the power supply 8A, a reverse current protection diode 8C and a diode 8D which protects switching element 8B. The switching elements 6B and 8B may comprise, for example, an electronic switch such as a MOS-FET transistor. The circuit 8 has no substantial resistance, so the direct current pulse which flows through the switching element 8B from the direct current power supply 8A has very steep rising and falling edges, and is favorable for supplying a high frequency direct current pulse to the machine section. The switching element 8B operates in its unsaturated region, and the peak value of the amplified current pulse is maintained by controlling the time during which the switching element 8B is closed.

Further, a pulse signal generating device 7 is provided which separately supplies pulse signals having an ON time and OFF time to the switching elements 6B and 8B. The switching

elements 6B and 8B respond to the respective pulse signals and operate so as to close during the pulse signal ON time. The pulse signal generating device 7 includes a controller which controls the pulse signal ON time and OFF time. Typically, in wire cut electric discharge machines it is preferable to supply a power pulse with a relatively short ON time. While it depends on the prescribed surface roughness of the machined workpiece 3 and on the workpiece 6 material, normally a power pulse having an ON time of several μs , and at the most several 10's of μs , is used.

Conductors 11A and 11B, which connect the machine section of the wire cut electric discharge machine to the power supply unit 5, are comprised so that line inductance can be reduced as much as possible, such that the current pulses flowing through the gap will have steep rising and falling edges. For example, a coaxial cable 11 is used in which conductors 11A and 11B are coaxially oriented. Stranded wire can also be used to connect the machine section to the power supply unit 5. In the illustrated embodiment, the conductor 11A is connected on one end to the cathodes of the direct current power supplies 6A and 8A, and on the other end to the wire. Conductor 11B is connected on one end to the anodes of the direct current power supplies 6A and 8A, and on the other end to the workpiece 3.

A transformer 13 is provided which is positioned in the vicinity of the gap and which converts a direct current pulse transmitted from the direct current power supply 8A through the switching element 8B and the coaxial cable 11 into an alternating current pulse. The transformer 13 includes a ferrite ring core 13A having only small high frequency loss and a primary winding 13B and secondary winding 13C wound around the ring core 13A. The ring core 13A has, for example, an outside diameter of 55 mm and inside diameter of 30 mm, and is formed by superimposing two ferrite toroidal cores. The windings 13B and 13C may, for example, include conductors coated with teflon resin. The primary winding 13B is

connected to the conductors 11A and 11B, and the secondary winding 13C is connected to the gap. In order to maintain the direct current high frequency pulse waveform sent from the direct current power supply 8A through the switching element 8B, it is desirable to make the number of primary windings 13B as small as possible. Similarly, in order to maintain the alternating current high frequency pulse waveform induced in the secondary winding 13C, it is desirable to make the number of primary windings 13B as small as possible. Because the energy per current pulse during a second cut is relatively small during electric discharge, the primary and secondary windings 13B and 13C in the illustrated embodiment are respectively wound one turn and two turns, so as to supply a high repeating frequency current pulse to the gap. Therefore the ratio of windings between the primary winding 13B and the secondary winding 13C is 1:2, and the effective [rms] voltage value of the voltage across the winding 13C is 2 times the voltage across winding 13B, while the current value in winding 13C is 1/2 that of 13B. The sum of the number of windings should preferably be between 1 and 4.

The circuit 8 has no substantial resistance, and can therefore easily increase the peak value of the direct current pulse sent through the switching element 8B. It is therefore easily possible to supply an alternating current high frequency pulse having a relatively high current value to the gap without changing the winding ratio between the primary winding and the secondary winding.

In the present invention, the transformer 13 is housed in a compact case 12. Switches 14A, 14B, 14C, and 14D are also housed in the case 12. The switch 14A, positioned between the conductor 11B and the workpiece 3, and the switch 14B, positioned between the conductor 11A and the wire 1, operate simultaneously. The switch 14C, positioned between the conductor 11B and the primary winding 13B, and the switch 14D, positioned between the secondary winding 13C and the workpiece 3, are controlled simultaneously, and operate

inversely to the opening and closing of the switches 14A and 14B. When a direct current pulse of the desired value is supplied to the gap from the circuit 6 or the circuit 8 or from both the circuits 6 and 8, the switches 14A and 14B are closed, and the switches 14C and 14D are open. When a high frequency alternating current pulse is supplied from the circuit 8 to the gap, the switches 14A and 14B are open and the switches 14C and 14D are closed.

The operation of the power supply system in FIG. 1 is now described with reference to FIG. 2A, FIG. 2B, FIG. 2C, FIG. 2D and FIG. 2E. FIG. 2A, FIG. 2B, FIG. 2C, FIG. 2D, and FIG. 2E respectively illustrate the waveforms for the voltage of the pulse signal supplied from the pulse signal generation circuit 7 to the switching element 8B, the direct current pulse sent from the direct current power supply 9A through the switching element 8B to the primary winding 13B, the voltage induced in secondary winding 13C, the voltage applied to the gap, and the current flowing at the gap.

With the switch 6E and the switches 14A and 14B open, and with the switches 14C and 14D closed, the pulse signal generating circuit 7 supplies a pulse signal, as shown in FIG. 2A, to the switching element 8B for which the pulse hold time -- which is to say the ON time T_{ON} -- and the pulse repeat cycle -- which is to say the OFF time T_{OFF} -- are set. For example, when it is required that the workpiece 3 be machined to a relatively smooth surface roughness of between 0.5 and 3.5 R max, T_{ON} should be set to 50ns-500ns, and T_{OFF} to 500ns-several 10s of μ s. The direct current supplied to the primary winding 13B through the coaxial cable 11, as shown in FIG. 2B, rises rapidly after passing through the switching element 8B and falls rapidly when ON time T_{ON} ends. When a direct current pulse is generated in the primary winding 13B, an alternating current is induced in the secondary winding 13C and the voltage in FIG. 2C is applied to the gap. After a certain no-load period, an electrical discharge is generated

in the gap and, as shown in FIG. 2E, an alternating current pulse flows through the gap and the workpiece 3 is machined.

As will be apparent to practitioners of the art, the OFF time T_{OFF} is set so that A_{TOFF} , which is the voltage pulse repeat cycle in FIG. 2C, does not become excessively short. Since the alternating current pulse flows through the gap, the insulating effect of the gap is immediately restored even if A_{TOFF} is short. Therefore it is possible to set the OFF time T_{OFF} to a small value. Also, in comparison to a direct current flow through the gap, electrolytic effects on the workpiece surface are prevented.

The transformer 13 and the switches 14A, 14B, 14C, and 14D, all of which are housed together in the case 12, will now be described with reference to FIG. 3, FIG. 4, and FIG. 5.

As is best shown by FIG. 3, case 12 may be a quadratic prism-shaped small box, positioned adjacent to a work stand 4 which is supported in the work tank or a work pan (not shown). The workpiece 3 is fastened to the work stand 4 and faces the wire electrode 1, which is strung between the pair of wire guides 2A and 2B under a prescribed tension. The wire guides 2A and 2B define a perpendicular axis with respect to the contour path to be cut in the workpiece 3 and are respectively housed in guide units 18A and 18B, which may be equipped with nozzles to jet the dielectric fluid toward the gap.

The case 12 has terminals 15A, 15B, 15C, 15D and 15E. The terminals 15A and 15B are connected to the end of coaxial cable 11 over a minimum distance using, for example, stranded wire. Similarly, the terminal 15C is connected to one of the guide units 18A and 18B, using, for example, the stranded wire 16A, and the terminals 15D and 15E are connected to the work stand 4 using the stranded wire 16B, each over a minimum distance. In place of stranded wire 16B, a metal plate having terminals 15D and 15E may be attached to the edge of work stand 4 using appropriate screws or welding. Thus the high

frequency alternating current produced in transformer 13 is supplied to the gap formed between the workpiece 3 and the wire 1 over the minimum distance, so that a high frequency current can be caused to flow through the gap.

As best shown in FIG. 4, the case 12 is divided into chambers 12A, 12B, and 12C. Chamber 12B is closest to the terminals 15A, 15B, and 15C, and houses the switches 14A and 14B. Chamber 12A is adjacent to chamber 12B, and houses the transformer 13. Chamber 12C is adjacent to chamber 12A, is closest to the terminals 15D and 15E, and houses the switches 14C and 14D.

Referring now to FIG. 5, a structure having multiple switches housed in the case 12 will be described in detail using the example of the switch 14D.

The well known butt-contact type switch 14D includes a stationary contact 14DS which has a contact surface 21 and a contact 14DM which has a contact surface 21 and moves at right angles to the contact surface 21. The respective contact surfaces 21 of the contacts 14DS and 14DM are formed so as to favorably conduct a high frequency power pulse. The relative movement between the contact surfaces of the contacts 14DM and 14DS is controlled by selectively supplying a fluid to the chamber 12C through one of the holes 20A and 20B from a fluid source (not shown) disposed outside of the chamber 12C. The switch 14D may include seals 19A, 19B, and 19C, such as O-rings, appropriately positioned to prevent fluid leakage.

FIG. 6 illustrates a power supply system in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention. The same reference numerals are assigned to elements corresponding to those described in FIG. 1, and an explanation thereof is omitted.

In the illustrated embodiment, an additional circuit 9 is provided which produces a direct current pulse and which includes a variable direct current power supply 9A, a switching element 9B, a reverse current protection diode 9C,

and a diode 9D which protects the switching element 9B. Except for the operational timing of the switching element 9B, the circuit 9 has the same constitution as the circuit 8, and a detailed description of its elements is omitted. A winding 13D, which is further connected to the circuit 9 through a coaxial cable 17 and wound around core 3A, is positioned in the case 12. A switch 14E is positioned between the winding 13D and the coaxial cable 17.

The operation of the power supply system will be described with reference to FIG. 2A, FIG. 2F, and FIG. 2G, which respectively illustrate the waveforms of the pulse signal voltage supplied from the pulse signal generating circuit 7 to the switching element 9B and the voltage induced in the secondary winding 13C.

With the switches 6E, 14A and 14B closed and the switches 14C, 14D and 14E open, the pulse signal generating circuit 7, as shown in FIG. 2A, supplies a pulse signal to the switching element 8B for which the pulse duration -- the ON time -- is set to T_{ON} , and the pulse repeating cycle -- the OFF time -- is set to T_{OFF} . As a result, a voltage pulse, as shown in FIG. 2G, having a repeating frequency which is even higher than that of the voltage in FIG. 2C is generated at the secondary winding 13C, and an extremely high frequency alternating current pulse for machining the workpiece 3 flows through the gap.

The purpose of the present invention is not limited to precisely the forms disclosed. In light of the above description, it will be clear that many improvements and variations are possible. For example, the case 12 in the embodiment is positioned so as to be adjacent to the work stand 4, but it could also be affixed to the side wall of the work tank or to the respective arms which support the guide units 18A and 18B. The above embodiment was selected for the purpose of explaining the essence and practical application of the invention. The scope of the invention is defined in the appended claims.

CLAIMS

1. An electric discharge machine power supply system (5) for machining a workpiece (3) by electric discharge by supplying a power pulse to a machining gap formed between a tool electrode and a workpiece, comprising:

a direct current power supply (8A);

a pulse generating means (7) for generating a series of pulse signals having a controlled ON time and a controlled OFF time;

a switching element (8B) connected in series with the direct current power supply and responsive to said pulse signals for converting the direct current from the direct current power supply into direct current pulses;

a low inductance cable (11) for carrying the direct current pulses from the switching element to the vicinity of the machining gap, said low inductance cable comprising first and second conductors (11A, 11B), each having first and second ends the first ends of the first and second conductors being connected to the direct current power supply; and

a direct to alternating current converter positioned in the vicinity of the machining gap having an input and an output, the input being connected to the second ends of the first and second conductors, and the output being connected to the machining gap for delivering alternating current pulses to the machining gap.

2. The power supply system in accordance with Claim 1, wherein the low inductance cable comprises a coaxial cable(11).

3. The power supply system in accordance with Claim 1, wherein the direct to alternating current converter

includes a transformer (13) having a primary winding (13A) connected to one end of the low inductance cable and a secondary winding (13B) connected to the machining gap, for passing energy supplied to the primary winding from the direct current power supply to the secondary winding by electromagnetic induction.

4. The power supply system in accordance with Claim 3, wherein the transformer includes a ring core (13C) for conducting an induction current.

5. The power supply system in accordance with Claim 1, wherein the direct current power supply includes a variable direct current power source (8A).

6. The power supply system in accordance with Claim 3, wherein the primary winding has a minimum number of turns of wire.

7. The power supply system in accordance with Claim 6, wherein the number of turns of wire in the primary winding is 1.

8. The power supply system in accordance with Claim 7, wherein the sum of turns of wire in the primary winding and the secondary winding is 4 or less.

9. The power supply system in accordance with Claim 1 further comprising a means for electrically bypassing the direct to alternating current converter.

10. The power supply system in accordance with Claim 9, wherein the bypass means comprise a third conductor, one end of which is connected to the other end of the first conductor, and the other end of which is connected to one of the tool electrode or the workpiece, a fourth conductor, one end of which is connected to the other end of the second conductor, and the other end of which is connected to the other of the tool electrode or the

workpiece, and a switching means (14A-14C) for controlling the flow of current through the third and fourth conductors.

11. The power supply system in accordance with Claim 10, wherein the direct to alternating current converter and the switching means are housed in a single case (12) positioned in the vicinity of the machining gap.

12. The power supply system in accordance with Claim 1, wherein the series circuit of the direct current power supply (8A) and the switching element (8B) comprises substantially no resistance circuit.

13. The power supply system in accordance with Claim 12 further comprising a second direct current power supply (6A), a second switching element (6B) and a current limiting resistor (6C) all of which are connected in series to each other and connected in parallel to the series combination of the direct current power supply (8A) and the switching element (8B).