

PLASMA ARC WELD REPAIR OF HIGH NICKEL METAL ALLOYS

Governments Rights in the Invention

[0001] The invention was made by or under contract with the Air Force of the United States Government under contract number F33615-01-C-5232, and the U.S. Government may have rights to this invention.

Field of the Disclosure

[0002] The present disclosure generally relates to plasma arc weld repairing of high nickel metal alloys and, in particular, to weld repairing thin cross-section components made from IN-100 material.

Background of the Disclosure

[0003] Weld repairing nickel-based super alloys having low aluminum and titanium content is relatively simple. However, as the aluminum and titanium content increases in concentration, welding becomes much more difficult. As the aluminum and titanium content increases, the ductility of the material is proportionately reduced. The low ductility causes the material to crack when using standard welding techniques.

[0004] Integrally bladed rotors are increasingly being used in high performance gas turbine engines. Their use is driven by requirements for improved performance and efficiency. Conventional rotors have airfoils that are retained by a mechanical connection, such as a dovetail slot formed into the rim of the disk. With an integrally bladed rotor, the airfoils and disk are typically formed from one contiguous block of metal and the block is machined to the final geometry. The improved performance achieved by the integrally bladed rotors result from their ability to retain airfoils with less disk mass than that required with a conventional rotor and from a reduction in leakage of compressed air through gaps between blade and disk.

[0005] Notwithstanding the performance improvement from the use of integrally bladed rotors, one major disadvantage has been the lack of reliable methods for repairing the airfoils that are damaged beyond blendable limits during operation. When the airfoils are damaged beyond the blendable limits, the entire rotor had to be removed from service and

replaced with a new integrally bladed rotor. This is extremely costly in terms of raw material and labor expense.

[0006] Integrally bladed rotors made from IN-100 material or other nickel based super alloys with high aluminum and/or high titanium content have been difficult, if not impossible, to weld repair due to their inherently low ductility which causes the material to crack during the weld operation or during the post-weld heat treatment.

[0007] A method is described in the following disclosure which overcomes the difficulty in weld repairing integrally bladed airfoils made from nickel based super alloys.

Summary of the Disclosure

[0008] In accordance with one aspect of the disclosure, a method for weld repairing airfoils made from IN-100 material is provided. The method includes removing a damaged portion of the airfoil by machining the airfoil to a relatively smooth surface. Powdered IN-100 material is fed to a plasma arc welding device. A plurality of IN-100 weld beads are deposited along the damaged portion of the airfoil in a bi-directional pattern by the welding device to eliminate thermal transients associated with stopping and starting the plasma arc at the ends of the weld.

[0009] In another aspect of the present disclosure, a method for weld repairing airfoils made from a nickel based super alloy material is provided. The method includes removing a damaged portion of the airfoil. Powdered nickel alloy material is fed to a plasma arc welding device. A plurality of weld beads are deposited along the damaged portion of the airfoil in a bi-directional pattern with the welding device to eliminate thermal transients associated with stopping and starting the plasma arc at the ends of the weld.

[0010] In accordance with another aspect of the present disclosure, a method for weld repairing an integrally bladed rotor made from IN-100 material in a gas turbine engine is provided. The method includes removing a damaged portion of the rotor. Powdered IN-100 material is fed to a plasma arc welding device. The welding device is moved in a first direction while depositing a first weld bead along the damaged portion of the rotor. The welding device is then moved in a second direction while depositing a second weld bead adjacent the first weld bead. The first and second directions are bi-directionally opposing one another.

[0011] Other applications of the present invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art when the following description of the best mode contemplated for practicing the invention is read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

- [0012] Fig. 1. is a schematic representation of a plasma arc welding device;
- [0013] Fig. 2 is a perspective view of a portion of an integrally bladed rotor with a damaged airfoil extending therefrom;
- [0014] Fig. 3 is a perspective view of the airfoil shown in Fig. 2 after the damaged portion has been machined;
- [0015] Fig. 4 is a perspective view of the airfoil of Fig. 2 having a plurality of weld beads applied to the damaged portion;
- [0016] Fig. 5 is a perspective view of the airfoil of Fig. 2 illustrating a machining operation on the weld;
- [0017] Fig. 6 is a perspective view of a finished airfoil; and
- [0018] Fig. 7 is a flow chart illustrating a method for repairing a component made from a high hardener content nickel based material.

[0019] While the following disclosure is susceptible to various modifications and alternative constructions, certain illustrative embodiments thereof have been shown in the drawings and will be described below in detail. It should be understood, however, that there is no intention to limit the disclosure to the specific forms disclosed, but on the contrary, the intention is to cover all modifications, alternative constructions, and equivalents falling within the spirit and scope of the disclosure as defined by the appended claims.

Detailed Description of the Disclosure

[0020] The present disclosure provides a method for weld repairing components that are made from low ductile, high hardener content nickel super alloys such as IN-100 or the like. IN-100 is a vacuum melted and investment cast nickel-base alloy recommended for high temperature applications of approximately 1850-1900°F. IN-100 was developed by International Nickel Co., Inc. The material composition includes: chromium 8.0-11.0%, cobalt 13.0-17.0%, molybdenum 2.0-4.0%, vanadium .70-1.20%, titanium 4.50-5.00%, aluminum 5.0-6.0%, carbon 0.15-0.20%, boron 0.01-0.02%, zirconium 0.03-0.09%, iron

1.0% maximum, manganese 0.20% maximum, silicon 0.20% maximum, sulfur 0.015% maximum, with the remainder being nickel. In one embodiment of the present disclosure, the component illustrated is an airfoil formed on an integrally bladed rotor, however, other components with similar geometry that are formed of IN-100 or similar materials used in relatively high temperature applications such as compressor stator vanes, diffuser vanes, and the like, are also contemplated.

[0021] The method described herein advantageously overcomes weld repair problems inherent with high nickel super alloys having a minimum percentage of hardening elements such as aluminum and titanium. These hardening elements cause the nickel based material to have low ductility and thus, are susceptible to cracking during a typical weld repair operation or in subsequent post-weld heat treatment. The welding device employed with the present disclosure can be one of any commonly used in the industry, however, with materials such as IN-100 it is extremely difficult to draw the material into a wire, a stick, or a rod because of the brittle nature of the material at standard ambient conditions. Therefore, the repair method would typically include the use of a plasma arc welding device or a microplasma arc welding device using powder feedstock as will be described hereinafter.

[0022] Integrally bladed rotors can be made from IN-100 material to meet temperature requirements in high performance gas turbine engines. IN-100 has excellent properties for relatively high temperature components such as those used in the compressor section of a gas turbine engine, however, the airfoils have a tendency to crack during weld repair operations or in post-weld heat treatment. IN-100 has been developed from a class of high nickel super alloys that have a relatively high percentage of hardening material such as aluminum and titanium. The aluminum content in IN-100 is over five percent by weight, and the titanium content is approximately 5.5% by weight. These percentages of hardeners place IN-100 well above the accepted composition limits for weld repairing. Typically, nickel based alloys that have higher hardener content than three percent aluminum or six percent titanium are extremely difficult to weld due to the brittle nature of the low ductility material resulting from such a material composition.

[0023] Referring now to Fig. 1, a plasma arc welding device 10 is generally represented. A welding power supply 12 is operationally connected to the plasma arc welding device 10 to provide electrical power thereto. A powder feeder 14 delivers powdered metal such as IN-100 through a carrier gas conduit 16 to a nozzle torch 18. The nozzle torch 18 can include a shield gas cup 20 and a shield gas nozzle 22 surrounding the

exterior perimeter of the nozzle torch 18. The welding power supply 12 is electrically connected via an electrical conduit 24 to an electrode 26. The carrier gas conduit 16 transports the powdered material to a powder channel 28 that extends through the nozzle torch 18 toward a nozzle tip 30. The electrode 26 forms a plasma arc 32 through the powdered material as the powdered material exits the powder channel 28 at the nozzle tip 30. The plasma arc 32 heats the powdered material and melts a portion of a component 36 at the point of impact. The plasma arc 32 causes the powdered material to liquify and form a weld deposit or bead 34 on the component 36.

[0024] Shield gas 38 is delivered through the shield gas nozzle 22 to provide an inert environment around the plasma arc 32. The shield gas prevents oxidation and impurities in the weld deposit 34 as is known to those skilled in the art. The welding operation can alternatively be performed inside an inert gas purge box (not shown) where the welding device 10 and component 36 are completely surrounded by inert shielding gas such as argon.

[0025] A heat sink 40 may be positioned below the edge of component 36 that is to be welded to provide a controlled environment to promote uniform heat transfer through the component 36. The heat sink 40 may be made from a variety of materials such as copper, steel or graphite. The heat sink 40 has been shown to provide satisfactory heat transfer when positioned a distance away from the edge of component 36 that is to be welded, such as approximately .200 inches, during welding. While the heat sink 40 has been found to be advantageous in some instances to the welding process, it is also possible to perform the weld repair without the use of a heat sink 40 or may be most advantageously employed with the heat sink 40 in contact with the component 36.

[0026] Figs. 2-6 illustrate one embodiment for weld repairing a thin cross-sectioned component. As used herein, "thin" is defined as up to approximately 0.25 inch, although other dimensions are certainly possible. Fig. 2 shows a portion of an integrally bladed rotor 50 wherein the airfoil 52 is integrally formed with a disk 54. The disk 54 is partially cut away for ease of illustration. Integrally bladed rotors 50 are typically formed from a single block of metal. In a conventional compressor rotor arrangement, when an airfoil is damaged, the airfoil can be removed from the disk and replaced with a new airfoil. However, when an airfoil on an integrally bladed rotor 50 is damaged beyond a predefined limit, the airfoil must be repaired or the entire integrally bladed rotor 50 must be replaced at great expense in both materials and labor cost.

[0027] The damaged portion 56 of the airfoil, shown in Fig. 2, can be machined with a suitable device, such as a grinder or machine tool, to form a substantially straight machined edge 58 as shown in Fig. 3. Fig. 4 illustrates the plasma arc welding device 10 applying weld lines or beads 60 to build up the airfoil 52 where the airfoil 52 was previously damaged. For ease of illustration, the welding device 10 is depicted farther away from the airfoil 52 than would likely be used in actual practice. In practice, it is to be understood the torch on welding device 10 would be fairly close to the airfoil 52, for example, approximately 0.2 in., although other distances are possible. Each weld bead 60 is formed by one pass of the plasma arc welding device 10. A first weld bead 62 is deposited on the airfoil 52 as the welding device 10 is moved in a first direction corresponding to arrow 70. A second weld bead 64 is deposited atop the first weld bead 62 by immediately reversing the welding device upon reaching the end of the airfoil so that it is moving in a direction corresponding to arrow 72 which is in the opposite direction of the application first weld bead 62. This continuous bi-directional movement of the plasma arc device has been found to produce crack-free welds in airfoils 52 made from IN-100. The continuous bi-directional pattern of the weld application eliminates thermal transients at the ends of the weld. Further, successive weld beads should be applied in a continuous manner with no delay between passes. The plasma arc welding torch 10 can be controlled electronically with a multi-axis positioning system, commonly known to those skilled in the art. Optionally, the plasma arc welding device can be hand operated when a particular application lends itself to such processing.

[0028] Referring now to Fig. 5, after the airfoil 52 has been completely built up with welded material 60 to the approximate original height 74 and the appropriate post weld heat treatment operations are completed, the weld material 60 can be machined with a suitable device, such as a grinding bit 76 or the like. The airfoil 52 is machined to the finished geometry as shown in Fig. 6, and is ready for operational use after the completion of any other processes appropriate to the specific application, such as post-machining stress relief, coating application, and shot peening.

[0029] Referring now to Fig. 7, the method employed by the present disclosure can be used to weld repair any high hardener content nickel super alloy without producing cracks in the material. The method is particularly advantageous for repairing complex geometry such as airfoils on an integrally bladed rotor. In operation, a damaged component is machined to remove the damaged portion of the component to provide a relatively smooth surface for applying a weld bead at block 80. A welding device moves in a continuous bi-directional

manner while applying weld beads to a component at block 82. The weld material is cooled at block 84 and appropriately heat treated at block 86. The component is then finish machined at block 88 and is ready to be placed back into regular service after other applicable operations.

[0030] While the preceding text sets forth a detailed description of certain embodiments of the invention, it should be understood that the legal scope of the invention is defined by the claims set forth at the end of this patent. The detailed description is to be construed as exemplary only and does not describe every possible embodiment of the invention since describing every possible embodiment would be impractical, if not impossible. Numerous alternative embodiments could be implemented, using either current technology or technology developed after the filing date of this patent, which would still fall within the scope of the claims defining the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for weld repairing airfoils made from nickel alloy material, comprising the steps of:
removing a damaged portion of the airfoil;
providing a chill block for a heat sink;
feeding powdered nickel alloy material to a plasma arc welding device; and
depositing a plurality of nickel alloy weld beads along the damaged portion of the airfoil in a continuous bi-directional pattern with the welding device.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein there is no delay between subsequent bi-directional weld passes.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein airfoil is located on a rotating component.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein the rotating component is a compressor rotor.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein the airfoil is located on a static component.
6. The method of claim 5, wherein static component is a compressor stator.
7. The method of claim 1, further including electronically controlling the welding device with a multiple axis positioning system.
8. The method of claim 1, further including hand controlling the welding device.
9. The method of claim 1, further including positioning the chill block approximately .200 inches from the weld surface.
10. The method of claim 1, further including cooling the weld material.
11. The method of claim 1, further including heat treating the weld material.
12. The method of claim 1, further including machining the weld material to a desired specification.

13. The method of claim 1, wherein the nickel alloy is IN-100.
14. A method for weld repairing airfoils made from a nickel based super alloy material, comprising the steps of:
 - removing a damaged portion of the airfoil;
 - feeding powdered nickel alloy material including at least six percent titanium by weight to a plasma arc welding device; and depositing a plurality of weld beads along the damaged portion of the airfoil in a bi-directional pattern with the welding device.
15. The method of claim 14, wherein there is no delay between successive weld passes.
16. The method of claim 14, wherein the nickel based material includes at least three percent aluminum by weight.
17. The method of claim 14, wherein the nickel based material includes approximately fifty percent nickel by weight.
18. The method of claim 14, wherein the airfoil is located on a rotating component.
19. The method of claim 18, wherein the rotating component is a compressor rotor.
20. The method of claim 14, wherein the airfoil is located on a static component.
21. The method of claim 20, wherein the static component is a compressor stator.
22. The method of claim 14, further including electronically controlling the welding device with a multiple axis positioning system.
23. The method of claim 14, further including hand controlling the welding device.
24. The method of claim 14, further including providing a chill block for a heat sink.
25. The method of claim 24, further including positioning the chill block approximately .200 inches from the weld surface.

26. The method of claim 14, further including cooling the weld material.
27. The method of claim 14, further including heat treating the weld material.
28. The method of claim 14, further including machining the weld material to a desired specification.