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(54) **METHODS AND APPARATUS TO RETAIN A ROTOR BLADE**

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B64C 11/30 (2006.01)
F01D 5/30 (2006.01)
F04D 29/34 (2006.01)
F04D 29/36 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **B64C 11/06** (2013.01); **B64C 11/04** (2013.01); **B64C 11/30** (2013.01); **F01D 5/30** (2013.01); **F04D 29/34** (2013.01); **F04D 29/36** (2013.01)

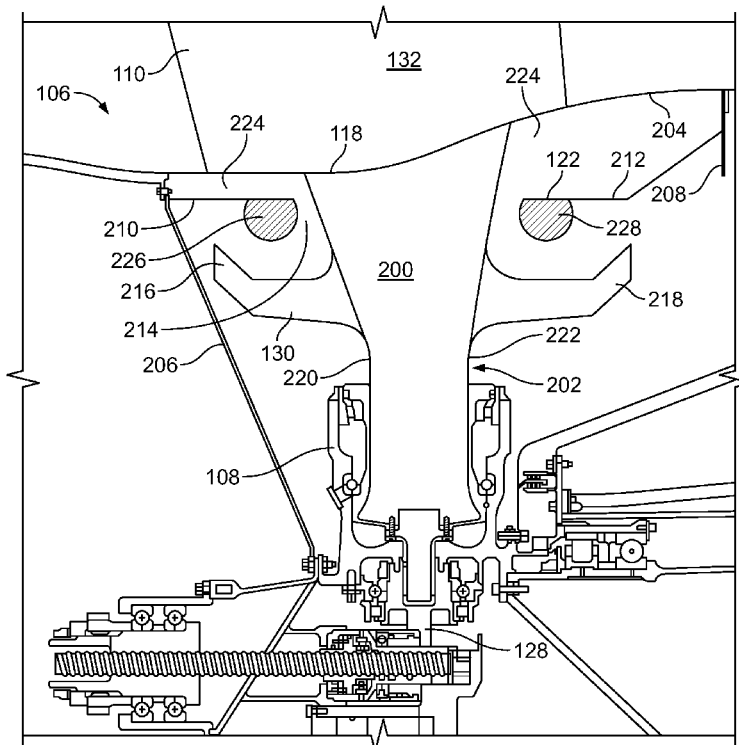
(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC F04D 29/34; F04D 29/36; F04D 29/362; F04D 29/364; B64C 11/06; B64C 11/04; B64C 11/30; B64C 11/20; F01D 5/30
See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**
Methods and apparatus to retain a rotor blade are disclosed herein. An example apparatus includes a rotor blade coupled to a rotatable hub of an engine system. The rotor blade includes a root, a flange and a blade. The root and the flange are disposed inside a cowling, and the blade is disposed outside of the cowling. The example apparatus also includes a retainer disposed inside the cowling adjacent the flange. The flange is to engage the retainer to retain the rotor blade with the engine system.

20 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



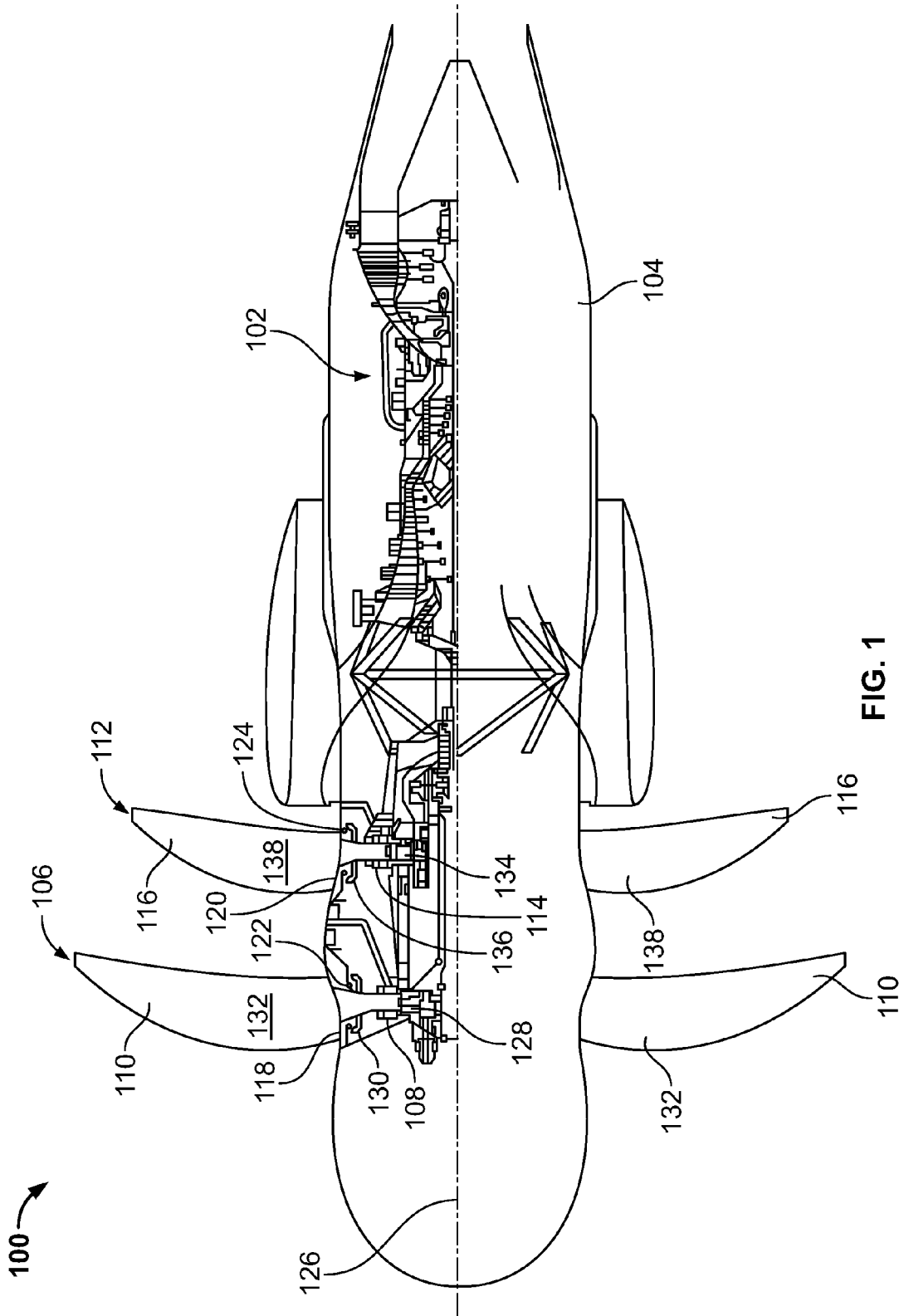


FIG. 1

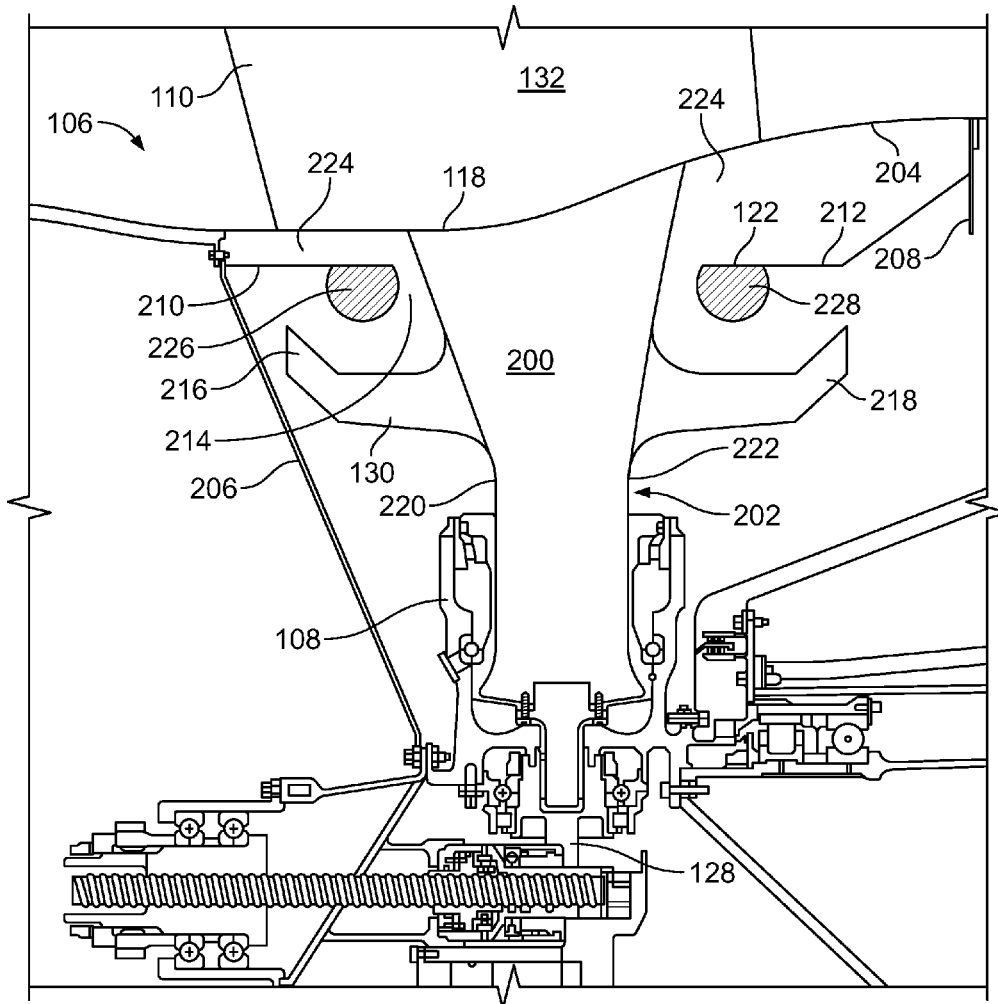


FIG. 2

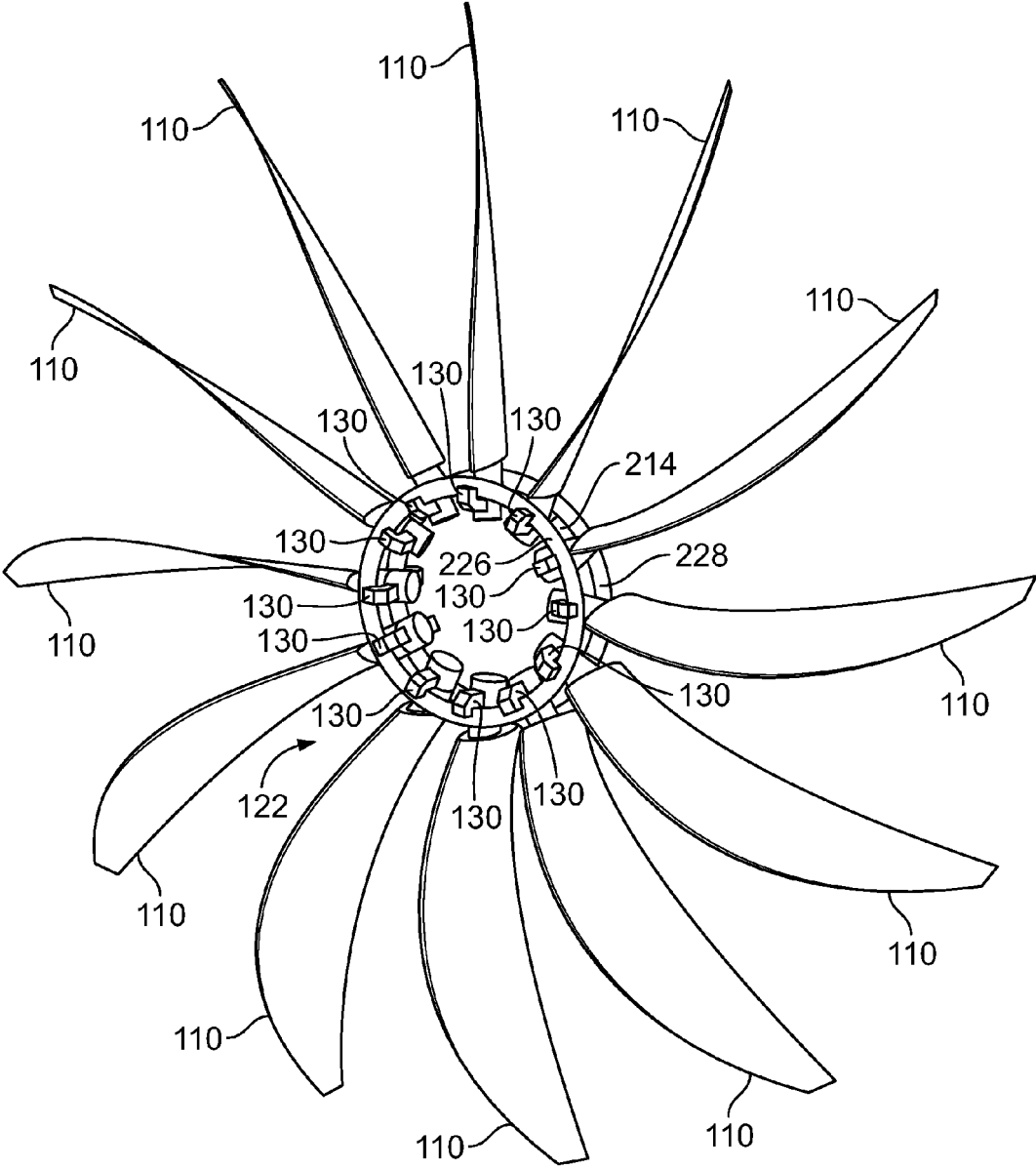


FIG. 3

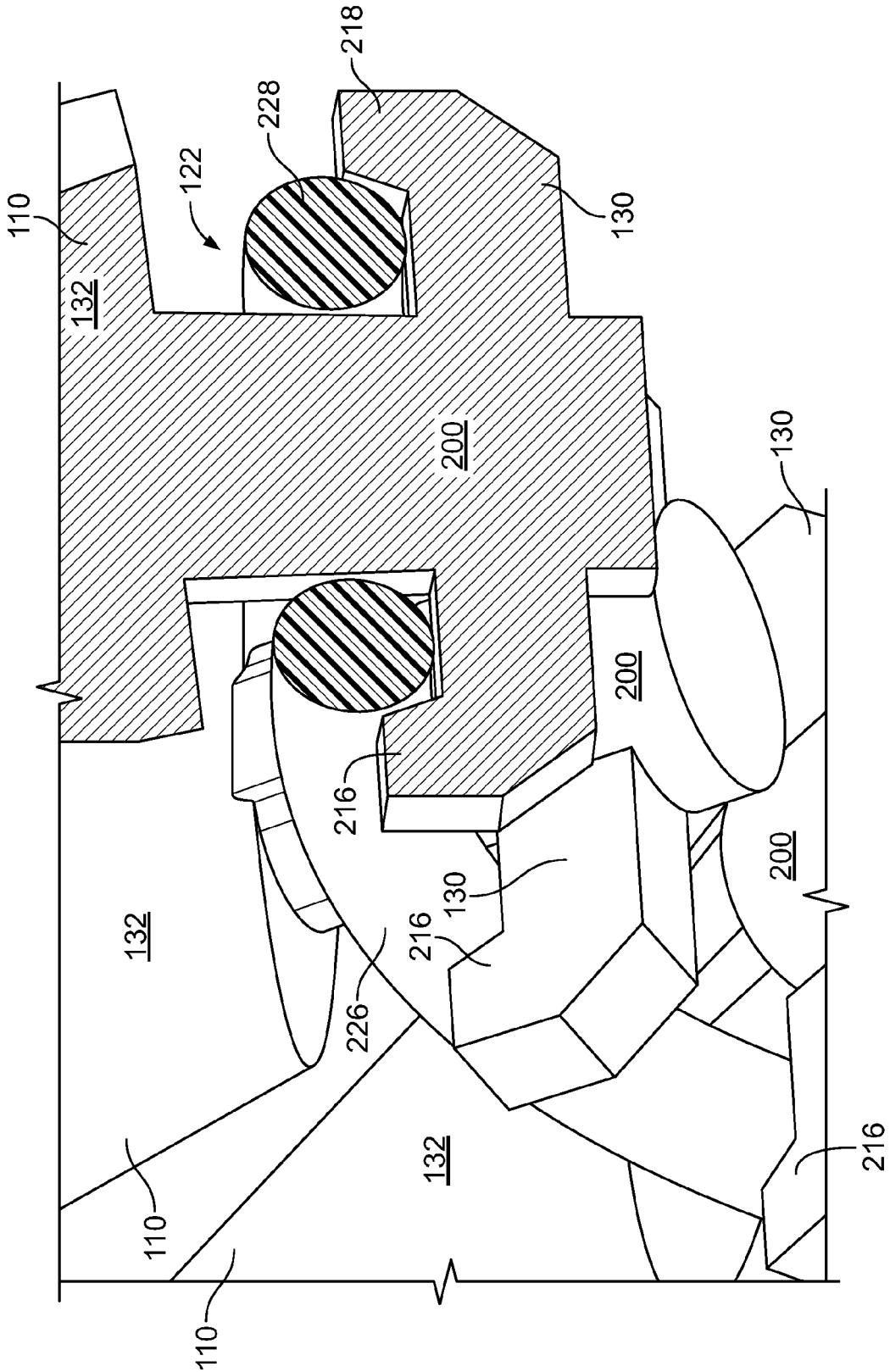


FIG. 4

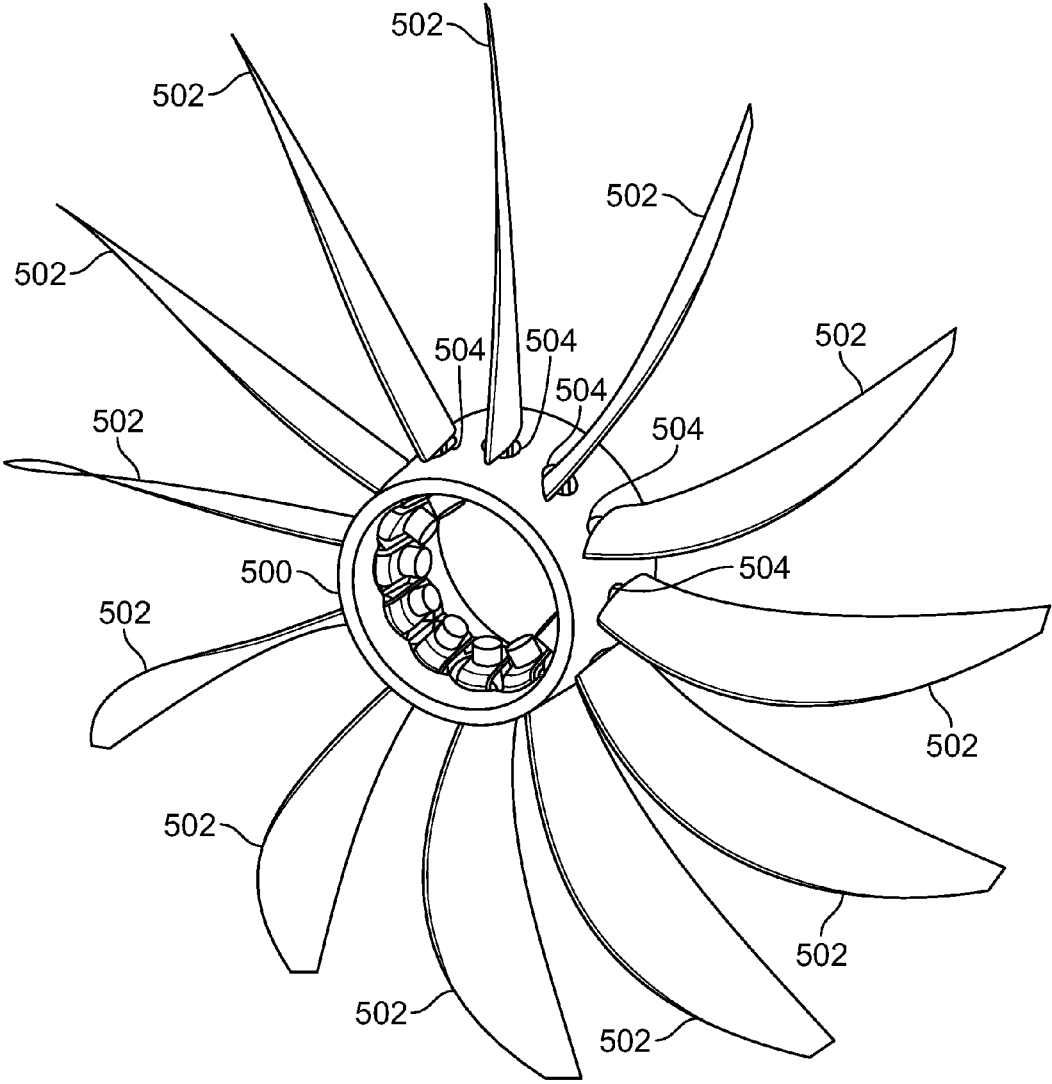


FIG. 5

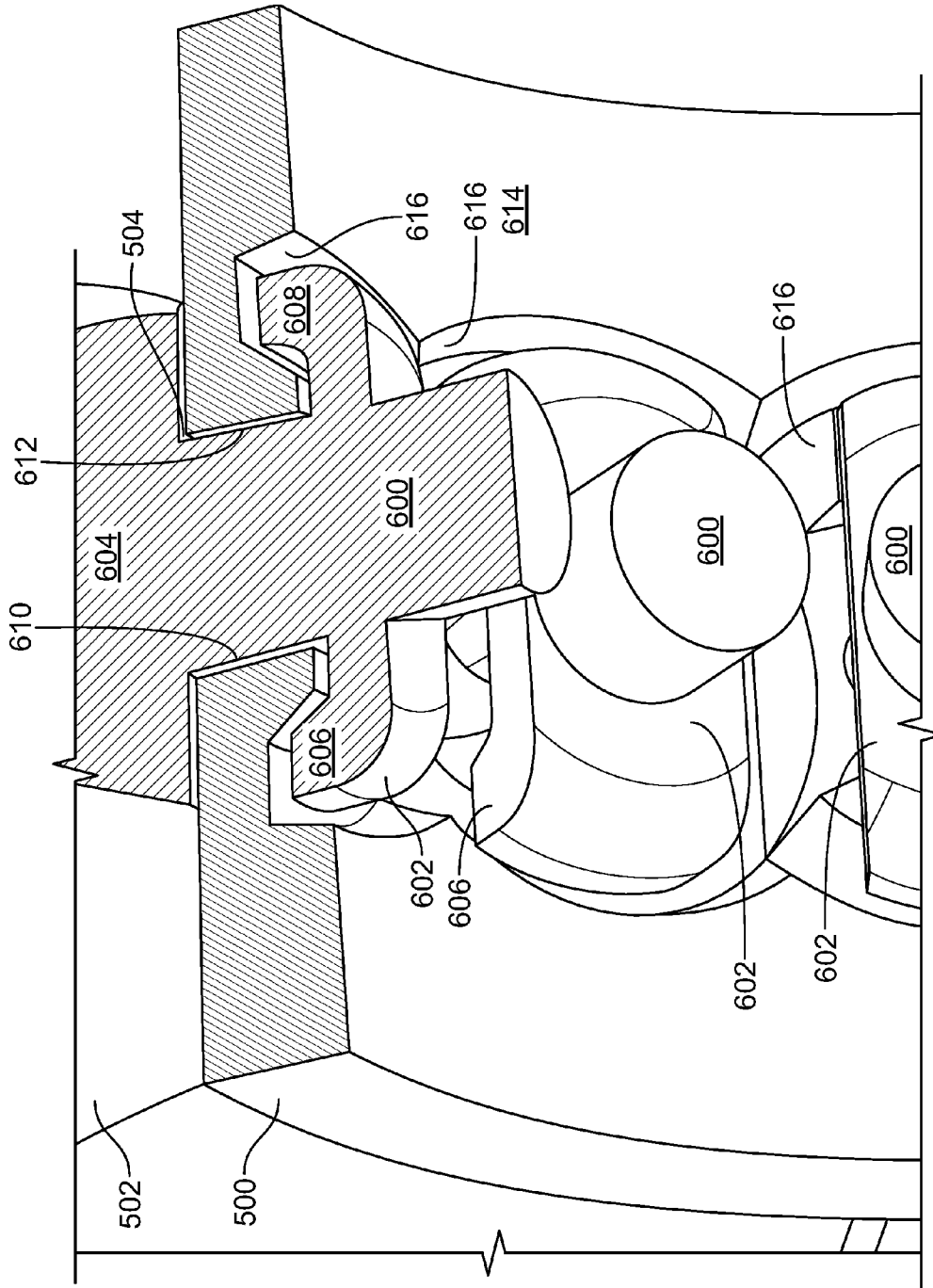


FIG. 6

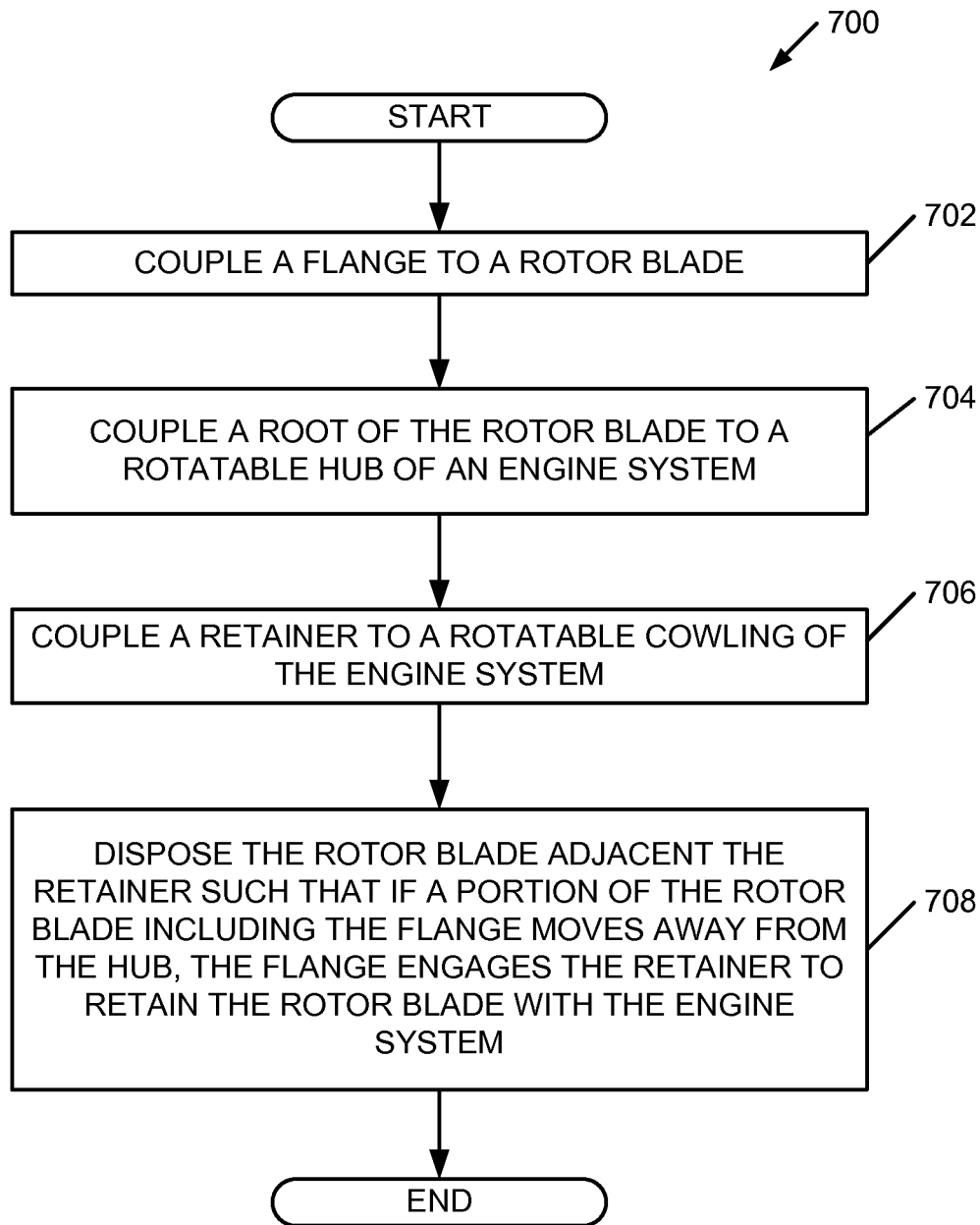


FIG. 7

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METHODS AND APPARATUS TO RETAIN A ROTOR BLADE

FIELD

The present disclosure relates generally to rotor blades and, more particularly, to methods and apparatus to retain a rotor blade.

BACKGROUND

Generally, an open fan engine system for an aircraft includes counter-rotating fans in which fan blades are disposed outside of an engine housing. The fan blades may be coupled to a pitch mechanism to control a pitch angle of the fan blades.

SUMMARY

An example apparatus includes a rotor blade coupled to a rotatable hub of an engine system. The rotor blade includes a root, a flange and a blade. The root and the flange are disposed inside a cowling, and the blade is disposed outside of the cowling. The example apparatus also includes a retainer disposed inside the cowling adjacent the flange. The flange is to engage the retainer to retain the rotor blade with the engine system.

Another example apparatus disclosed herein includes a retainer to be coupled to an open fan engine system to rotate with a rotor blade. The retainer defines an aperture through which the rotor blade is to extend, and the retainer is to engage the rotor blade if a portion of the rotor blade moves toward the retainer.

Another example apparatus disclosed herein includes a rotor blade to be coupled to an open fan engine system. The rotor blade includes a root, a flange and a blade. A portion of the flange extends away from a longitudinal axis of the rotor blade. The flange is to engage a portion of the open fan engine system if a portion of the rotor blade including the flange moves toward the portion of the open fan engine system.

An example method disclosed herein includes coupling a root of a rotor blade to a rotatable hub of an engine system. The rotor blade includes a flange disposed along the root. The example method further includes disposing the rotor blade adjacent a retainer such that if a portion of the rotor blade including the flange moves away from the hub, the flange engages the retainer to retain the rotor blade with the engine system.

The features, functions and advantages that have been discussed can be achieved independently in various examples or may be combined in yet other examples further details of which can be seen with reference to the following description and drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates an example open fan engine system disclosed herein.

FIG. 2 is an enlarged view of an upstream open fan of the example open fan engine system of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 illustrates an example retainer and example rotor blades of the example open fan engine system of FIGS. 1-2.

FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view of the example retainer and one of the example rotor blades of FIG. 3.

FIG. 5 illustrates another example retainer and other example rotor blades disclosed herein.

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FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional view of the example retainer of one of the example rotor blades of FIG. 5.

FIG. 7 is a flow chart representative of an example method disclosed herein.

Wherever possible, the same reference numbers will be used throughout the drawing(s) and accompanying written description to refer to the same or like parts. As used in this disclosure, stating that any part (e.g., a layer, film, area, or plate) is in any way positioned on (e.g., positioned on, located on, disposed on, or formed on, etc.) another part, means that the referenced part is either in contact with the other part, or that the referenced part is above the other part with one or more intermediate part(s) located therebetween. Stating that any part is in contact with another part means that there is no intermediate part between the two parts.

DESCRIPTION

Methods and apparatus to retain a rotor blade are disclosed herein. An example open fan engine system may include an open fan including a plurality of rotor blades. In some examples, blades of the rotor blades are disposed outside of a cowling. Roots of the rotor blades may be disposed inside the cowling and coupled to a rotatable hub, which is driven by an engine. In some examples, the roots are coupled to a pitch mechanism to enable pitch rotation of the rotor blades. The example rotor blades disclosed herein include flanges to engage a retainer disposed inside the cowling to retain the rotor blade with the open fan engine system. Thus, the example methods and apparatus disclosed herein enhance retention of rotor blades with open fan engine systems.

FIG. 1 is a cutaway view of an example open fan engine system **100** (e.g., an unducted fan engine system, open rotor engine system, etc.) disclosed herein. The example open fan engine system **100** of FIG. 1 includes a multi-stage turbine engine **102** disposed in a cowling assembly **104**. Other examples employ other engines. The example open fan engine system **100** includes an upstream open fan **106** having a rotatable upstream hub **108** and a plurality of upstream rotor blades **110**. The example open fan engine system **100** also includes a downstream open fan **112** having a rotatable downstream hub **114** and a plurality of downstream rotor blades **116**. Other examples include other numbers of open fans (e.g., a single open fan). In the illustrated example, the engine **102** is coupled to the upstream open fan **106** and the downstream open fan **112** via the upstream hub **108** and the downstream hub **114**, respectively.

The cowling assembly **104** includes an upstream rotatable cowling **118** and a downstream rotatable cowling **120**. The example upstream rotatable cowling **118** is coupled to the upstream hub **108** to rotate with the upstream open fan **106**. The example downstream rotatable cowling **120** is coupled to the downstream hub **114** to rotate with the downstream open fan **112**. In the illustrated example, the upstream rotatable cowling **118** includes a first retainer **122**, and the downstream rotatable cowling **120** includes a second retainer **124**. As described in greater detail below, the first retainer **122** retains the upstream rotor blades **110** with the example open fan engine system **100**, and the second retainer **124** retains the downstream rotor blades **116** with the example open fan engine system **100**.

During operation of the example open fan engine system **100** of FIG. 1, the engine **102** drives the upstream hub **108** and the downstream hub **114** to rotate the upstream open fan **106** and the downstream open fan **112** in opposite directions.

Thus, the example open fan engine system **100** of FIG. 1 is a counter-rotating open fan engine system. In the illustrated example, the upstream open fan **106** and the downstream open fan **112** rotate about a center axis **126** of the engine **102**.

In the illustrated example, each of the upstream rotor blades **110** is coupled to the upstream hub **108** and a first pitch mechanism **128**. During operation, the first pitch mechanism **128** rotates the upstream rotor blades **110** to adjust a pitch of the upstream rotor blades **110**. Each of the example upstream rotor blades **110** includes a first flange **130** disposed inside the upstream rotatable cowling **118**. In the illustrated example, the upstream rotor blades **110** extend through the upstream rotatable cowling **118** such that blades **132** of the upstream rotor blades **110** are disposed outside of the cowling assembly **104**. As described in greater detail below, if a portion of one of the upstream rotor blades **110** moves toward the first retainer **122**, the first flange **130** of the one of the upstream rotor blades **110** engages the first retainer **122** to retain the one of the upstream rotor blades **110** with the engine system **100**.

The downstream rotor blades **116** of the example downstream open fan **112** are coupled to the downstream hub **114** and a second pitch mechanism **134**. During operation, the second pitch mechanism **134** rotates the downstream rotor blades **116** to adjust a pitch of the downstream rotor blades **116**. Other examples do not include pitch mechanisms. Each of the example downstream rotor blades **116** includes a second flange **136** disposed inside the downstream rotatable cowling **120**. In the illustrated example, the downstream rotor blades **116** extend through the downstream rotatable cowling **120** such that blades **138** of the example downstream rotor blades **116** are also disposed outside of the cowling assembly **104**. If a portion of one of the downstream rotor blades **116** including the second flange **136** moves toward the second retainer **124**, the second flange **136** of the one of the downstream rotor blades **116** engages the second retainer **124** to retain the one of the downstream rotor blades **116** with the engine system **100**. Thus, the second flanges **136** and/or the second retainer **124** enhance retention of the downstream rotor blades **116**.

FIG. 2 is an enlarged, cutaway view of a portion of the upstream open fan **106** of FIG. 1. The upstream open fan **106** and the downstream open fan **112** are substantially similar. Therefore, the following description of the upstream open fan **106** can be applied to the downstream open fan **112**. Thus, to avoid redundancy, the downstream open fan **112** is not separately described herein.

In the illustrated example, the upstream rotor blade **110** includes a root **200**. The example upstream rotor blade **110** is coupled to the upstream hub **108** and the first pitch mechanism **128** via the root **200**. In the illustrated example, the first flange **130** is disposed along the root **200** outward of the upstream hub **108** (i.e., above the upstream hub **108** in the orientation of FIG. 2). If a portion **202** of the upstream rotor blade **110** including the flange **130** moves toward the first retainer **122**, the first flange **130** of the example upstream rotor blade **110** of FIG. 2 engages the first retainer **122** to retain the upstream rotor blade **110** with the example open fan engine system **100**.

In the illustrated example, the first retainer **122** is coupled to the upstream rotatable cowling **118**. The upstream rotatable cowling **118** illustrated in FIG. 2 includes an exterior wall **204**, a first support **206** and a second support **208**. In the illustrated example, the first retainer **122** is disposed inside the upstream rotatable cowling **118** between the first flange **130** and the exterior wall **204**. The example first retainer **122**

is coupled to the first support **206** and the second support **208** via a first bracket **210** and a second bracket **212**, respectively. In some examples, some or all of the first retainer **122** is composed of titanium and/or Kevlar®. Other examples are composed of other material(s). In the illustrated example, the first retainer **122** defines an aperture **214** through which the upstream rotor blade **110** extends.

In some examples, a shape of the first flange **130** corresponds to a shape of the first retainer **122**. In the illustrated example, the first flange **130** extends away from a longitudinal axis of the upstream rotor blade **110**. In some examples, a longitudinal axis of the first flange **130** is substantially parallel to the center axis **126** of the engine **102**. Other examples include flanges oriented differently than the first flange **130** illustrated in FIG. 2. The example first flange **130** of FIG. 2 includes a first hook **216** and a second hook **218**. In the illustrated example, the first hook **216** is disposed on a first side **220** of the upstream rotor blade **110**, and the second hook **218** is disposed along a second side **222** of the upstream rotor blade **110** opposite the first side **220**. The example first hook **216** and the example second hook **216** curve or hook toward the exterior wall **204**. In some examples, the first flange **130** is spaced apart from the blade **132** to define a space **224** to receive the first retainer **122**.

The example first retainer **122** of FIG. 2 includes a first ring **226** and a second ring **228**. The example first ring **226** is disposed on the first side **220** of the upstream rotor blade **110**, and the example second ring **228** is disposed on the second side **222** of the upstream rotor blade **110**. In the illustrated example, the first ring **226** and the second ring **228** have partially circular cross-sections. However, the above-noted shape is merely an example and, thus, other shapes (e.g., rectangular cross-sections) may be used without departing from the scope of this disclosure.

In the illustrated example, the first ring **226** is disposed in the space **224** and between the first hook **216** and the exterior wall **204** of the upstream rotatable cowling **118**. The example second ring **228** of FIG. 2 is disposed in the space **224** and between the second hook **218** and the exterior wall **204** of the upstream rotatable cowling **118**. In the illustrated example, the first hook **216** of the upstream rotor blade **110** surrounds a portion of the first ring **226**, and the second hook **218** surrounds a portion of the second ring **228**. Thus, if the portion **202** of the upstream rotor blade **110** moves away from the upstream hub **108**, the first hook **216** engages the first ring **226** and the second hook **218** engages the second ring **228** to retain the upstream rotor blade **110** with the example open fan engine system **100**. Thus, the example first flange **130** and/or the example first retainer **122** enhance retention of the example upstream rotor blade **110**.

FIG. 3 illustrates the upstream rotor blades **110** and the example first retainer **122** of FIGS. 1-2. In the illustrated example, the first ring **226** and the second ring **228** are spaced apart to define the aperture **214** through which the upstream rotor blades **110** extend through the first retainer **122**. The example first retainer **122** surrounds the upstream hub **108** and is disposed outward of each of the first flanges **130** of the upstream rotor blades **110** such that the first retainer **122** is positioned to engage each of the first flanges **130**. The example first ring **226** and the example second ring **228** are substantially concentric and have substantially equal diameters. In the illustrated example, the first ring **226** and the second ring **228** are substantially coaxial with the center axis **126** of the engine **102** and, thus, rotate about the center

axis 126 with the upstream open fan 106 and the upstream rotatable cowling 118 during operation of the example open fan engine system 100.

FIG. 4 is an enlarged, cross-sectional view of the upstream rotor blades 110 and the example first retainer 122 of FIG. 3. In the illustrated example, the first hook 216 of each of the upstream rotor blades 110 surrounds a portion of the first ring 226. The second hook 218 of each of the upstream rotor blades 110 surrounds a portion of the second ring 228. As a result, if the pitch mechanism rotates the upstream rotor blades 110 a given amount, the first flanges 130 contact the first retainer 122. Thus, the example first retainer 122 enables a finite amount of pitch rotation. As described in greater detail below, other example retainers do not limit pitch rotation of rotor blades.

FIG. 5 illustrates another example retainer 500 and other example rotor blades 502 disclosed herein, which may be used in conjunction with an open fan engine system such as, for example, the open fan engine system 100 of FIG. 1. In the illustrated example, the retainer 500 is a ring defining a plurality of apertures 504. In some examples, some or all of the retainer 500 is composed of titanium and/or Kevlar®. Other examples are composed of other material(s). One of the rotor blades 502 extends through each of the apertures 504 of the example retainer 500. In some examples, the retainer 500 illustrated in FIG. 5 is disposed inside and coupled to a rotatable cowling such as, for example, the upstream rotatable cowling 118 of FIG. 1, the downstream rotatable cowling 120 of FIG. 1, or any other rotatable cowling. In other examples, the retainer 500 is integrally formed with the rotatable cowling.

FIG. 6 is an enlarged, cross-sectional view of the example retainer 500 and the example rotor blades 502 of FIG. 5. In the illustrated example, each of the rotor blades 502 includes a root 600, a flange 602 and a blade 604. In some examples, the root 600 is coupled to a hub such as, for example, the upstream hub 108 of FIG. 1, the downstream hub 114 of FIG. 1, or any other suitable hub. In the illustrated example, each of the flanges 602 includes a first hook 606 and a second hook 608 on a first side 610 of the rotor blade 502 and a second side 612 of the rotor blade 502, respectively. In the illustrated example, the first hook 606 and the second hook 608 curve or hook toward the retainer 500. In other examples, the flange 602 is disk-shaped and includes a rim (e.g., an annular rim) extending (e.g., curving) toward the blade 604. Other flanges are other shapes.

In the illustrated example, a cross-section of the retainer 500 is substantially rectangular. However, the above-noted shape is merely an example, and thus, other shapes may be used without departing from the scope of this disclosure. A surface 614 of the example retainer 500 adjacent the flanges 602 includes a plurality of annular grooves 616. Each of the grooves 616 surrounds one of the apertures 504 of the retainer 500 through which the rotor blades 502 extend through the retainer 500. In some examples, a size and a shape of each of the grooves 616 correspond to a size and a shape of each of the flanges 602. In the illustrated example, corresponding sizes and shapes of the grooves 616 and the flanges 602 enable portions of the first hook 606 and the second hook 608 to be disposed in the groove 616. In the illustrated example, the flanges 602 and the blades 604 of the rotor blades 502 are spaced apart from the retainer 500. Thus, the example rotor blades 502 of FIG. 6 are not in contact with the retainer 500. In other examples, the flanges 602 are in contact with the retainer 500 and/or coupled to the retainer 500 (e.g., rotatably coupled to the retainer 500 to enable pitch rotation of the rotor blades 502).

In some examples, the rotor blades 502 are coupled to a pitch mechanism such as, for example, the first pitch mechanism 128 of FIG. 1, the second pitch mechanism 134 of FIG. 2, or any other suitable pitch mechanism. In the illustrated example, the grooves 616 enables pitch rotation of the rotor blades 502 with an infinite rotational degree of freedom. If the root 600 of one of the example rotor blades 502 illustrated in FIG. 6 moves toward the example retainer 500, the first hook 606 and the second hook 608 engage the retainer 500 to retain the rotor blade 502 with the open fan engine system.

FIG. 7 depicts an example flow diagram representative of methods or processes that may be implemented using, for example, computer readable instructions. The example process of FIG. 7 may be performed using a processor, a controller and/or any other suitable processing device. For example, the example process of FIG. 7 may be implemented using coded instructions (e.g., computer readable instructions) stored on a tangible computer readable medium such as a flash memory, a read-only memory (ROM), and/or a random-access memory (RAM). As used herein, the term tangible computer readable medium is expressly defined to include any type of computer readable storage and to exclude propagating signals. Additionally or alternatively, the example process of FIG. 7 may be implemented using coded instructions (e.g., computer readable instructions) stored on a non-transitory computer readable medium such as a flash memory, a read-only memory (ROM), a random-access memory (RAM), a cache, or any other storage media in which information is stored for any duration (e.g., for extended time periods, permanently, brief instances, for temporarily buffering, and/or for caching of the information). As used herein, the term non-transitory computer readable medium is expressly defined to include any type of computer readable medium and to exclude propagating signals.

Alternatively, some or all of the example process of FIG. 7 may be implemented using any combination(s) of application specific integrated circuit(s) (ASIC(s)), programmable logic device(s) (PLD(s)), field programmable logic device(s) (FPLD(s)), discrete logic, hardware, firmware, etc. Also, one or more operations depicted in FIG. 7 may be implemented manually or as any combination(s) of any of the foregoing techniques, for example, any combination of firmware, software, discrete logic and/or hardware.

Further, although the example process of FIG. 7 is described with reference to the flow diagram of FIG. 7, other methods of implementing the process of FIG. 7 may be employed. For example, the order of execution of the blocks may be changed, and/or some of the blocks described may be changed, eliminated, sub-divided, or combined. Additionally, one or more of the operations depicted in FIG. 7 may be performed sequentially and/or in parallel by, for example, separate processing threads, processors, devices, discrete logic, circuits, etc.

FIG. 7 is a flowchart representative of an example method 700 that can be performed to enhance retention of a rotor blade with an engine system. With reference to FIGS. 1-6, the example method 700 of FIG. 7 begins by coupling the first flange 130 to one of the upstream rotor blades 110 (block 702). For example, the first flange 130 may be welded to the upstream rotor blade 110, coupled via one or more fasteners, integrally formed with the root 200, and/or coupled to the upstream rotor blade 110 using any other suitable technique. In some examples, the first flange 130 is coupled to the upstream rotor blade 110 along the root 200 of the upstream rotor blade 110. At block 704, the root 200

of the upstream rotor blade **110** is coupled to the rotatable upstream hub **108** of the open fan engine system **100**. In some examples, the root **200** is coupled to the rotatable upstream hub **108** via a pitch mechanism such as, for example, the first pitch mechanism **128** of FIG. **1** to enable pitch rotation of the upstream rotor blade **100**.

At block **706**, the first retainer **122** is coupled to the upstream rotatable cowling **118** of the open fan engine system **100**. In some examples, coupling the first retainer **122** to the upstream rotatable cowling **118** includes coupling the first ring **226** and the second ring **228** to the upstream rotatable cowling **118**. In some examples, the example retainer **500** is coupled to the rotatable cowling **118**. At block **708**, the upstream rotor blade **110** is disposed adjacent the first retainer **122** such that if the portion **202** of the upstream rotor blade **110** including the first flange **130** moves away from the rotatable upstream hub **108**, the first flange **130** engages the first retainer **122** to retain the upstream rotor blade **110** with the open fan engine system **100**. In some examples, the upstream rotor blade **110** is disposed adjacent the first retainer **122** by enclosing the upstream rotatable hub **108** in the cowling assembly **104**.

Although certain example methods, apparatus and articles of manufacture have been described herein, the scope of coverage of this disclosure is not limited thereto. On the contrary, this disclosure covers all methods, apparatus and articles of manufacture fairly falling within the scope of the claims.

The Abstract at the end of this disclosure is provided to comply with 37 C.F.R. §1.72(b) to allow the reader to quickly ascertain the nature of the technical disclosure. It is submitted with the understanding that it will not be used to interpret or limit the scope or meaning of the claims.

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus, comprising:
 - a rotor blade including a root having a first end and a second end opposite the first end, a flange and a blade coupled to the second end of the root, the first end of the root coupled to a rotatable hub of an engine system via a pitch mechanism, the flange extending from the root between the first end and the second end, the root and the flange disposed inside a cowling, the blade disposed outside of the cowling, the flange including a first hook extending outward from a first side of the root and upward toward the cowling; and
 - a retainer disposed inside the cowling adjacent the flange, the flange to engage the retainer to retain the rotor blade with the engine system.
2. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the retainer includes a groove to receive the first hook.
3. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the retainer comprises a ring coaxial with an axis of rotation of the cowling.
4. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the retainer defines an aperture through which a portion of the rotor blade is to extend.
5. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the retainer comprises a first ring and a second ring, the first ring disposed on a first side of the rotor blade, the second ring disposed on a second side of the rotor blade.
6. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the flange is spaced apart from the retainer.
7. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the retainer is coupled to the cowling.
8. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the flange is spaced apart from the blade to define a space to receive the retainer between the flange and the blade.

9. The apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the flange includes a second hook extending outward from a second side of the root and upward toward the cowling, the second side of the root opposite the first side of the root.

10. The apparatus of claim **9**, wherein the retainer includes a first ring and a second ring coaxial with the cowling, the first ring disposed adjacent the first side of the root and the second ring disposed adjacent the second side of the root, the first ring disposed between the first hook and the cowling and the second ring disposed between the second hook and the cowling.

11. The apparatus of claim **10**, wherein the first hook extends from the first side of the root further than the first ring and the second hook extends from the second side of the root further than the second ring.

12. An apparatus, comprising:

a rotor blade to be coupled to an open fan engine system, the rotor blade including a root having a first end and a second end opposite the first end, a flange and a blade coupled to the second end of the root, the first end of the root to be coupled to a pitch mechanism of the open fan engine system, a portion of the flange coupled to the root between the first end and the second end and extending away from a longitudinal axis of the rotor blade, the flange including a first hook extending outward from a side of the root and upward toward a cowling, the flange to engage a portion of the open fan engine system if a portion of the rotor blade including the flange moves toward the portion of the open fan engine system.

13. The apparatus of claim **12**, wherein the flange comprises a second hook disposed on an opposite side of the rotor blade as the first hook.

14. The apparatus of claim **12**, wherein the flange is spaced apart from the blade to define a space between the flange and the blade to receive a retainer.

15. A method, comprising:

coupling a first end of a root of a rotor blade to a rotatable hub and a pitch mechanism of an engine system, the root having a second end opposite the first end, the rotor blade including a flange disposed along the root between the first end and the second end, the flange including a first hook extending outward from a first side of the root and upward toward a rotatable cowling of the engine system; and

disposing a retainer adjacent the flange such that if a portion of the rotor blade including the flange moves away from the rotatable hub, the flange engages the retainer to retain the rotor blade with the engine system.

16. The method of claim **15**, wherein disposing the retainer adjacent the flange comprises disposing a first ring adjacent the flange.

17. The method of claim **16**, wherein disposing the retainer adjacent the flange comprises disposing a second ring adjacent the flange.

18. The method of claim **15** further comprising coupling the flange to the rotor blade.

19. The method of claim **15** further comprising coupling the retainer to the rotatable cowling.

20. The method of claim **15** wherein coupling the root of the rotor blade to the rotatable hub comprises coupling the root to the pitch mechanism, the pitch mechanism to enable pitch rotation of the rotor blade.