



US006971723B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Engle et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** US 6,971,723 B2
(45) **Date of Patent:** Dec. 6, 2005

(54) **GRADUATED RELEASE/PROPORTIONING VALVE**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **11/028,779**

(22) Filed: **Jan. 3, 2005**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2005/0162007 A1 Jul. 28, 2005

Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 60/539,482, filed on Jan. 27, 2004.

(51) **Int. Cl.**⁷ **B60T 8/18**

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **303/22.2; 303/74**

(58) **Field of Search** **303/22.2, 22.3, 303/22.8, 22.6, 74, 9.66, 33-38; 188/195**

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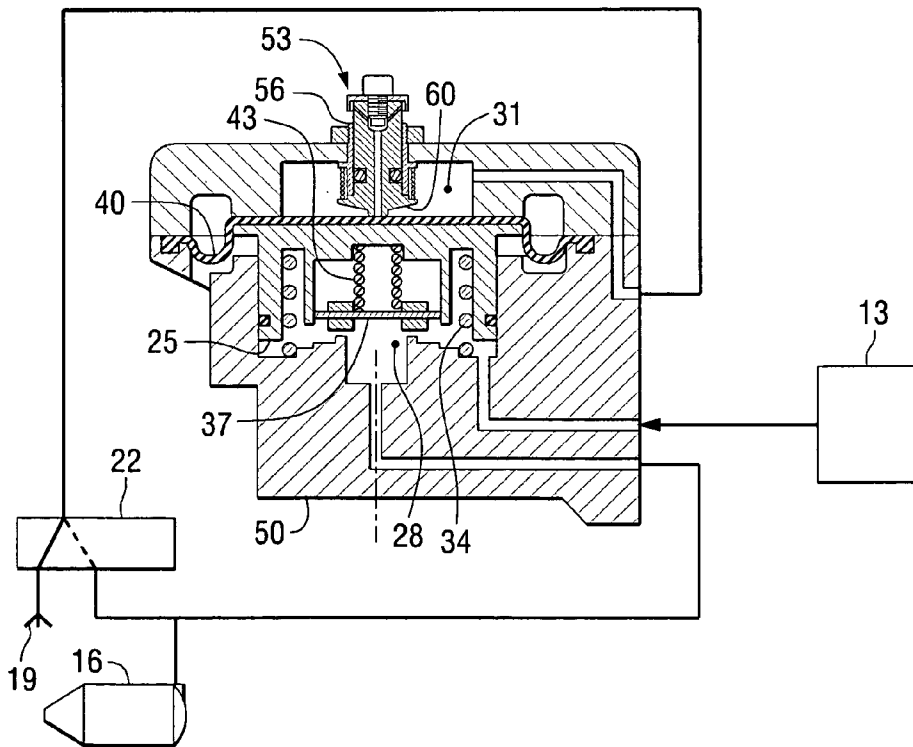
Primary Examiner—Douglas C. Butler

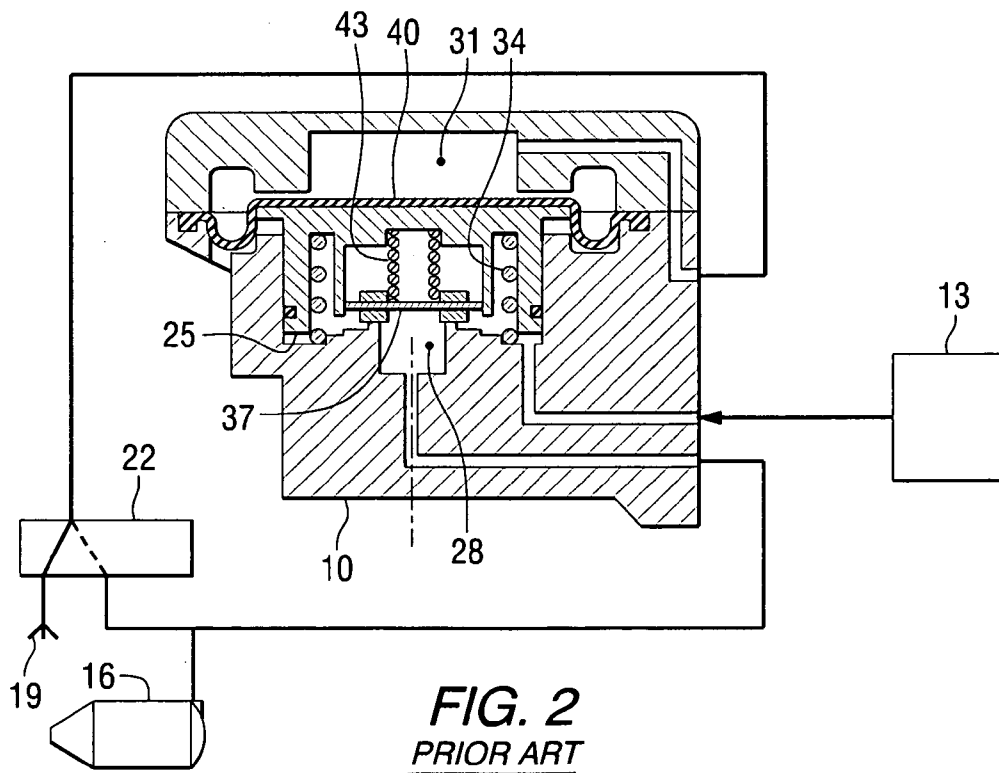
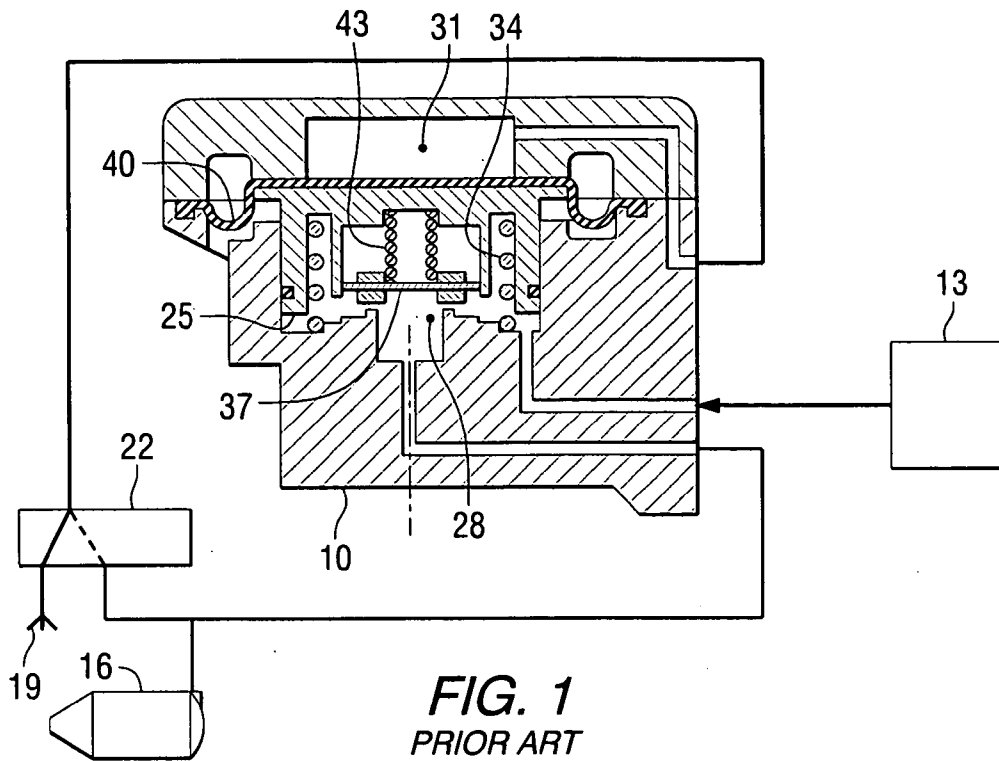
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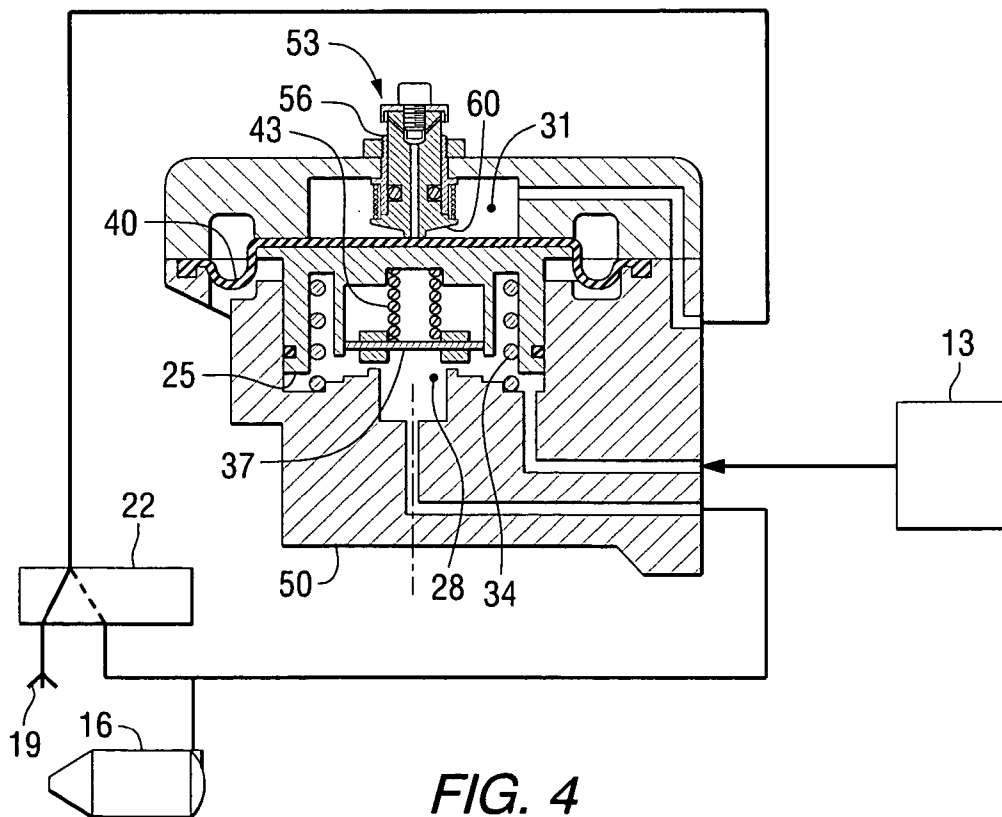
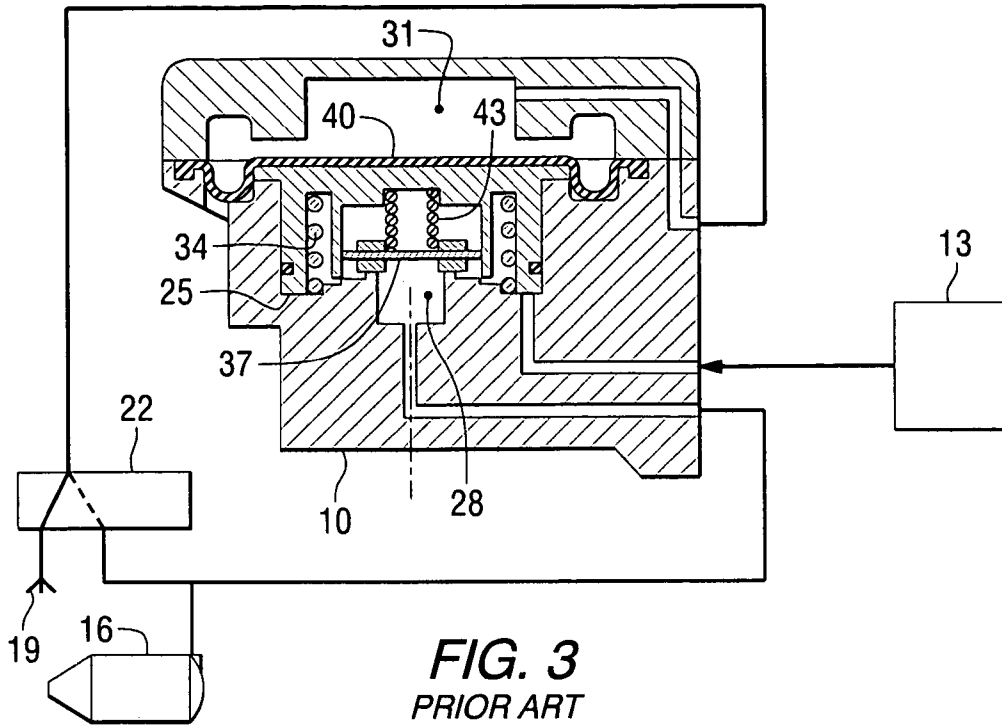
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A release graduating proportioning valve for a rail car brake system having a brake pipe, a brake cylinder, and a load sensor valve. The release graduating proportioning valve has a conventional proportioning piston with a control volume communicating on a first side thereof and a second volume communicating on an opposite side thereof. A graduated release valve member, which can be incorporated into the top of the proportioning valve, is interposed between the control volume and atmosphere for providing a graduated release of brake cylinder pressure via the control volume. The graduated release valve member is activated by movement of the proportioning piston.

10 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets







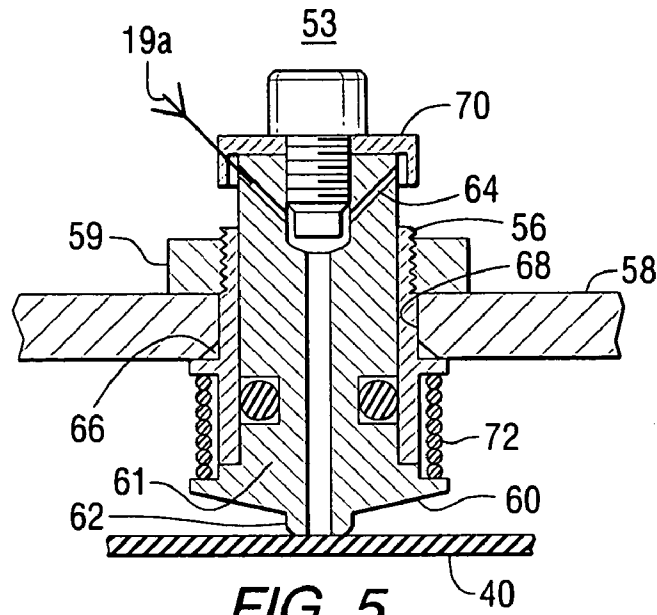


FIG. 5

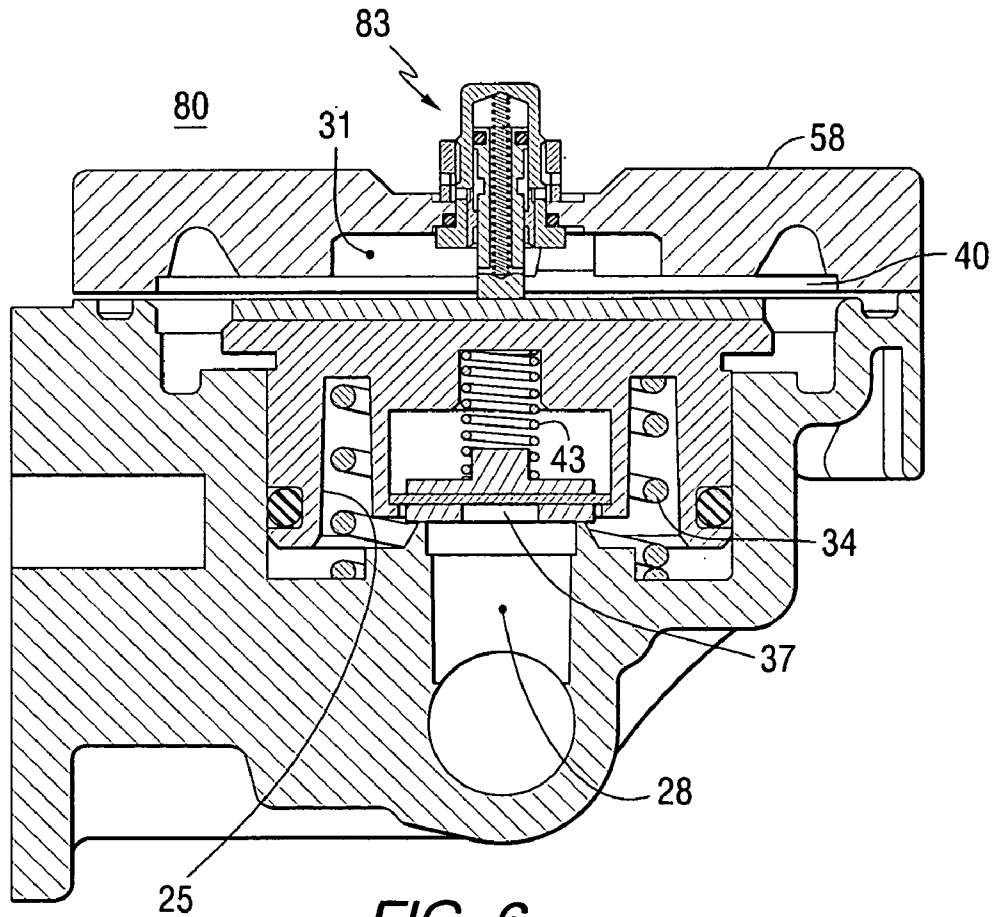


FIG. 6

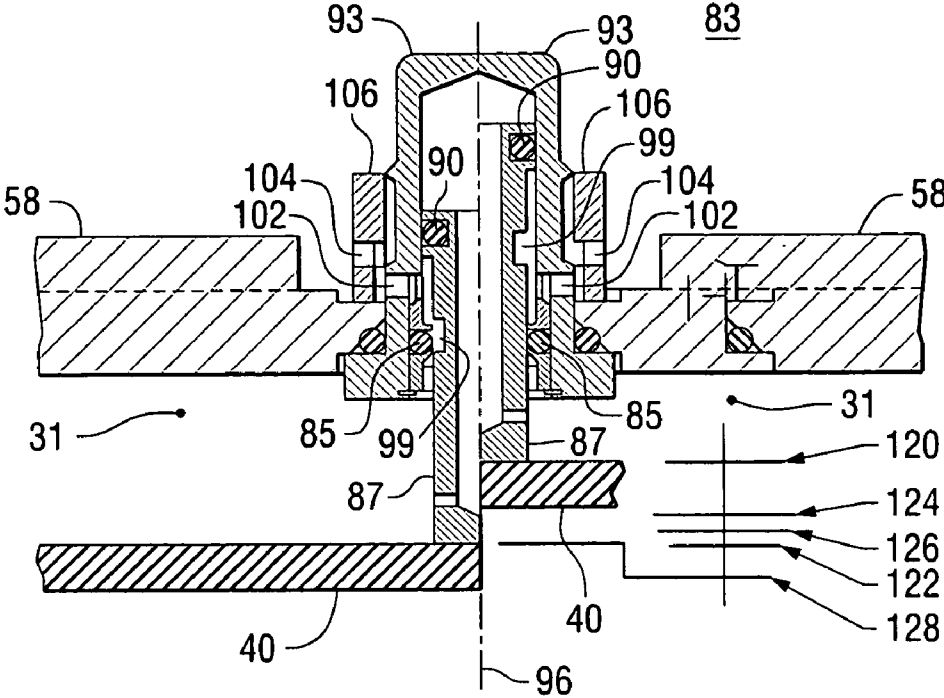


FIG. 7

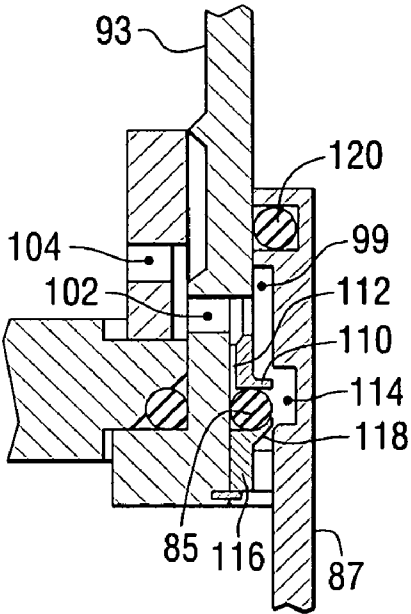


FIG. 8A

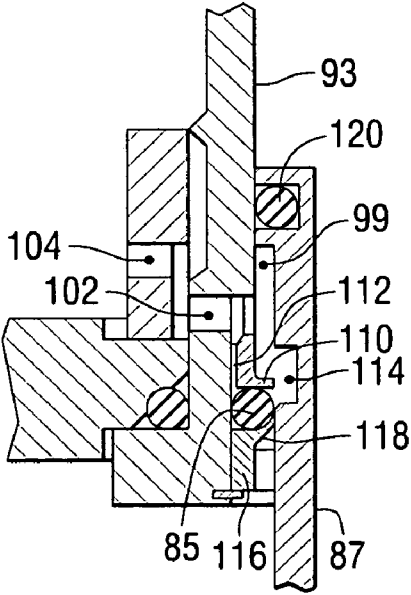


FIG. 8B

GRADUATED RELEASE/PROPORTIONING VALVE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 60/539,482, filed Jan. 27, 2004.

BACKGROUND

The invention relates generally to brake equipment for rail cars, and more particularly to an improved graduated release proportioning valve for empty-load brake equipment to implement a graduated release of braking effort on individual rail cars depending upon whether the rail cars are loaded or empty.

Conventional proportioning valves for empty-load braking equipment are well known in the art. U.S. Pat. No. 4,080,005, assigned to the assignee of the present application, which is hereby incorporated herein by reference, describes a prior art "Empty-load Fluid Pressure Brake System Including Proportioning Valve" for a rail car. As summarized in that patent, a control valve and the brake operating motor are interconnected by a flow path which includes a proportioning valve which is normally biased open and a changeover valve which selectively renders the proportioning valve effective dependent upon whether the car is empty or loaded. In the car-empty setting, the changeover valve permits auxiliary reservoir pressure to be proportionately reduced by the proportioning valve. A spring biases the proportioning valve open. In the empty setting of the changeover valve, this spring delays proportioning action until the quick service brake cylinder pressure development is complete. Thereafter, the proportioning action commences and continues during the development of pressure in the volume reservoir. It will be seen that the initial brake cylinder pressure development is unaffected by the proportioning valve, and this development is not delayed on the empty cars. The quick service feature is thus preserved.

The changeover valve could be manually set in either of its two positions, but it is preferred to use an automatic valve which normally assumes the load setting but on an empty car moves to empty setting as an incident to the automatic control valve moving to service position. The automatic changeover valve includes a means to sense the interval between sprung and unsprung parts of the car, the interval being smaller on loaded cars than on empty cars.

The proportioning valve described above has been manufactured by Wabtec™ as the "P-1 Proportioning Valve"™, as a primary component of the Wabtec™ "SC-1 Empty/Load Equipment"™ for some 35 years. Throughout that time the P-1™ has been a trouble-free valve that has provided highly reliable service on tens of thousands of freight cars.

However, a disadvantage of this proportioning valve, and other known proportioning valves, is that conventional proportioning valves do operate in a graduated release brake system. Recent advances in rail car brake systems include brake systems and equipment which permit rail cars to be controlled in a graduated release braking mode. Therefore, it would be desirable to provide a proportioning valve, similar to the P-1™ proportioning valve described above, except which can be operated in a graduated release braking mode.

SUMMARY

A release graduating proportioning valve is provided for a rail car brake system having a brake pipe, a brake cylinder, and a load sensor valve for detecting an empty/loaded car condition. Essentially, the release graduating proportioning valve can comprise a proportioning valve having conventional components used in combination with a graduated release valve member. By way of example, the conventional components include a proportioning piston having a control volume communicating on a first side of the piston and a second volume communicating on a second side of the piston. The load sensor valve conventionally has an empty car setting in which the control volume is connected to atmosphere via the load sensor valve, and a loaded car setting in which the control volume is connected to the brake cylinder via the load sensor valve.

The graduated release valve member can be interposed between the control volume and atmosphere, independent of the load sensor valve. The graduated release valve member has an open position, at which the control volume is connected to atmosphere via the graduated release valve member, and a closed position, at which the graduated release valve member does not connect the control volume to atmosphere. The graduated release valve member is activated by movement of the proportioning piston, to provide a graduated release of brake cylinder pressure, via the control volume.

The release graduating proportioning valve can further comprise incorporating the graduated release valve member into the top of a conventional proportioning valve, such that one end of the graduated release valve member extends into the control volume the opposite end extends outside of the proportioning valve, so as to selectively communicate the control volume with the atmosphere independently of the load sensor valve. The end of the graduated release valve member inside the control chamber can be positioned adjacent a diaphragm member which separates the control volume from the second volume on the opposite side of the proportioning piston. The diaphragm, and thus the end of the graduated release valve member, moves with the proportioning piston responsive to changes in pressure in the second volume. It is this movement which activates the graduated release valve member to connect, or isolate, the control volume to atmosphere. It should be noted that in this context, the control volume may not be totally isolated from atmosphere due to the existence of the load sensor valve connection to the control chamber, which can independently connect the control volume to atmosphere.

In certain embodiments, the graduated release valve member may have a longitudinal exhaust passage and a seat at the end of the valve member which closes the exhaust passage against the diaphragm. In this case, the exhaust passage will only connect the control volume to atmosphere when the proportioning piston, and the diaphragm, move sufficiently away from the seat to permit the control volume to communicate with the exhaust passage.

In other embodiments, the graduated release valve member may comprise a spool enclosed in a housing, and wherein the spool has radial and/or annular exhaust passages which connect with, depending on the position of the spool, an exhaust vent through the housing out to atmosphere. In this case, the end of the spool can similarly be positioned adjacent the diaphragm such that movement thereof, via the proportioning piston, activates the spool to exhaust or isolate the control chamber.

The release graduating proportioning valve can further comprise a spring or other resilient member to bias the graduated release valve member toward a closed position in which the control volume is not connected to atmosphere. Additionally, the release graduating proportioning valve can further comprise a graduated release valve member o-ring retainer, wherein the retainer can include upper and lower valve seat positioners, with the o-ring disposed therebetween. The lower positioner can have a skirt portion which at least partially captures the o-ring, and the upper positioner can have a vent passage communicating on a back side of the o-ring to inhibit a build up of pressure on the back side thereof which could cause the o-ring to blow-out of its position.

Further details, objects, and advantages of the invention will become apparent from the following detailed description and the accompanying drawings figures of certain embodiments thereof.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING FIGURES

A more complete understanding of the invention can be obtained by considering the following detailed description in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 illustrates a prior art proportioning valve in a normal, "full open" position.

FIG. 2 illustrates the prior art proportioning valve in FIG. 1 in a "balanced" position.

FIG. 3 illustrates the prior art proportioning valve shown in FIG. 1 in a "over travel" position.

FIG. 4 illustrates an embodiment of a release graduating proportioning valve according to the invention, shown in a "full open" position.

FIG. 5 is a detailed view of an embodiment of a release graduating valve as can be used in the release graduating proportioning valve shown in FIG. 4.

FIG. 6 illustrates another embodiment of a release graduating proportioning valve according to the invention.

FIG. 7 is a detailed view of an embodiment of a release graduating valve as can be used in the release graduating proportioning valve shown in FIG. 6.

FIGS. 8A and 8B are detail views illustrating a portion of the valve structure according to the invention by which an O-ring seal is retained.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF CERTAIN EMBODIMENTS

Referring now to the drawing figures, in which like reference numbers designate like components, a prior art proportioning valve 10, in this case, which can be the P-1™ proportioning valve is illustrated. The conventional proportioning valve 10 provides delivery of full brake cylinder pressure ("BCP") from the brake control valve 13 to the brake cylinder 16 when the rail car is loaded, and decreases the brake cylinder pressure when the car is empty, to either 60%, 50% or 40% of the full loaded-car pressure. On the empty car, when downstream BCP is reduced it is also admitted to an equalizing reservoir (not shown), which is sized in accord with the degree of proportioning to assure that the upstream BCP and the supply reservoir will equalize at the same pressure as occurs when the car is loaded. The conventional proportioning valve 10 is intended for use only with direct-release brake systems. The P-1™ proportioning valve is described in Wabtec™ Parts catalog No. 577723 (April 1987); and in Westinghouse Air Brake Company™

publication "AB Single Freight Car Air Brake Equipment with ABDX Type Control Valve" No. 5062-19 (August 1991). Both of these publications are hereby incorporated herein by reference.

The structure of the conventional P-1™ proportioning valve, hereafter referred to simply as the proportioning valve 10, is illustrated in FIG. 1, diagrammatically connected to a brake control valve 13, the brake cylinder 16, and the atmosphere 19 via a load sensor valve 22. The proportioning valve 10 is comprised of a proportioning piston 25 interposed between the brake control valve 13 and the brake cylinder 16. Brake cylinder pressure from the brake control valve 13 and pressure in the brake cylinder 16 can communicate with a first volume 28 on the underside of the proportioning piston 25, and a control volume 31 can communicate on top of the proportioning piston 25. A main piston spring 34 also acts on the underside of the proportioning piston 25. The load sensor valve 22 is interposed between the atmosphere 19 and both the control volume 31 and the brake cylinder 16. When the rail car is loaded, the load sensor valve 22 will open the control volume 31 on top of the proportioning piston 25 to atmosphere 19, so the main piston spring 34 as well as BCP from the brake control valve 13 forces the proportioning piston 25 upward, lifting the caged supply check valve 37 up and away from its seat. This allows full supply pipe pressure from the brake control valve 37 to pass through the open check valve and flow directly to the brake cylinder 16 to provide maximum BCP.

When the brakes are released, the proportioning piston 25 remains in its uppermost position, which allows the BCP to exhaust back through the brake control valve 13 (and a retainer, not shown). It should be noted that BCP is not admitted to the equalizing reservoir when the car is loaded.

On an empty car, once BCP exceeds approximately 12 psi, the load sensor valve 22 reacts to the empty-car spring deflection to open a port allowing the downstream BCP to be admitted back to the control volume 31 acting on the top of the proportioning piston 25, (and also to the equalizing reservoir). When sufficient, this pressure acts to force the proportioning piston 25 downward to seat the supply check valve 37. Because of the larger effective area above the proportioning piston, the pressure in the control volume 31 does not need to be as great as the pressure acting on the smaller area beneath the proportioning piston 25 to counteract it and balance the opposing piston force. Therefore, the downstream pressure acting on the larger top area will increase only until it is sufficient to overcome the higher pressure from the control valve 13 acting on the smaller area, combined with the main piston spring 34. The degree of pressure proportioning (60%, 50% or 40%) is thus set by the ratio of the opposing effective areas above and below the proportioning piston 25.

In setting the proportioning ratio, by design, the full area of the diaphragm 40 is allowed to remain constant, and the various ratios are achieved by reducing the diameter, and thus the effective area, of the piston extension and o-ring seal. The standard proportioning valve 10 has been proven to provide good sensitivity, and proportions the empty car BCP quite accurately.

By admitting the reduced downstream BCP to the equalizing reservoir, it is assured that the upstream pressure will equalize with the appropriate supply reservoirs during full service and emergency service at essentially the same equalization pressures as would occur on a loaded car with full BCP. These proper equalizations are important to assure timely brake releases when brake pipe pressure is restored.

When a direct brake release is made, the relatively small volume of upstream pressure between the proportioning valve **10** and the rail car brake control valve **13** will first exhaust back through the brake control valve **13**, and retainer, until falling just below the lower (proportioned) downstream BCP, whereupon the downstream pressure will overcome the relatively light supply check valve spring **43** and follow back through the check valve **37**, to atmosphere **19**. As the pressure further reduces, it will reach a point where the main piston spring **34** will be sufficient to force the proportioning piston **25** upward, lifting the check valve **37** away from its seat and assuring a full exhaust of the BCP. Also, as the downstream BCP reduces, it will reach a pressure where the load sensor valve **22** will reset under the force of a reset spring (not shown). When this occurs, the equalizing reservoir and the control volume **31** will be isolated from the brake cylinder **16**, and this pressure will exhaust directly through the load sensor valve **22** to atmosphere **19**.

Although proven reliable and accurate, the standard proportioning valve **10** is not suited for a graduated release brake, because the upstream BCP must be reduced until it falls below the proportioned downstream BCP before any air will be exhausted from the brake cylinder **16**.

FIGS. 1-3 illustrate three distinct operating positions of the conventional proportioning valve **10**, of which only two, the "full open position" (FIG. 1) and the "balanced position" (FIG. 2), are normally used. The third position, "over travel" (FIG. 3), is a result of building tolerance into the valve **10**, and is only achieved in operation when the input pressure is being reduced below the brake cylinder pressure. In direct release equipment, this is a transient condition, and has no influence on the performance of the valve **10**. These three positions are discussed in more detail below.

Regardless of the load sensor valve **22** condition, the full open position of the proportioning valve **10** permits unrestricted flow of air from the brake control valve **13** to the brake cylinder **16** in both application and release. When the load sensor valve **22** is in the "empty" position and a brake application is in effect, the proportioning piston **25** settles into the balanced position, as shown in FIG. 2. In this position, any increase in supply pressure as the brakes are applied will lift the proportioning piston **25**, cracking the supply check valve **37** with flow to the brake cylinder **16** resulting similar to that shown in FIG. 1. This allows brake cylinder pressure to increase, but the increase also applies to the top of the diaphragm **43**, forcing the proportioning piston **25** back down until the supply check valve **37** closes once more in the balanced position. Finally, it should also be noted that when supply pressure from the brake control valve **13** is reduced, the proportioning valve will be subject to an unbalanced condition, tending to force the proportioning piston downward, beyond the balanced position. This will result in no change in brake cylinder pressure, because the lower pressure behind the check valve **37** cannot force the check valve **37** off the seat until the brake control valve **13** has exhausted pressure from the supply line, and thus reduces the pressure above the check valve **37** to the point where the brake cylinder pressure slightly exceeds the momentary value of the decreasing supply pressure from the brake control valve **13**.

At this point the proportioning piston **25** will be in the over travel position, as shown in FIG. 3, and the brake cylinder pressure will flow out of the brake cylinder **16** at a pressure roughly equal to that in the supply pipe from the brake control valve **13**. The over travel position will be maintained until the supply pipe pressure has been

exhausted, which returns the load sensor valve **22** to its released position, and which will vent the control volume **31** above the proportioning piston **25** directly to atmosphere **19**.

The movement of the proportioning piston **25** beyond the balanced position toward the over travel position is the operating range in which a graduated release valve member can be added to the proportioning valve **10** in order to provide a graduated release of a light (e.g. "empty") car brake application. Such a modified proportioning valve could then follow supply pressure proportionally throughout a graduated release of brakes, rather than blocking air in the brake cylinder **16** until the brake control valve **13** output pressure had been reduced (as much as 50%) to the lower light/empty car brake cylinder pressure produced by the proportioning valve **10** in the empty car position, as shown in FIG. 3.

Referring now to FIG. 4, an embodiment of a release graduating proportioning valve **50** (hereinafter "RGV") according to the invention is illustrated. The RGV **50** can comprise a conventional proportioning valve which has been modified, according to the invention, to operate in a graduated release mode. In a basic form, this can involve simply adding a graduated release BCP exhaust valve member **53** to the standard proportioning valve, which can be operated by the proportioning piston **25** in concert with the existing BCP supply valve.

As illustrated, the supply side of the RGV **50** is unchanged from the conventional proportioning valve, and can operate in the manner described above during pressure reduction in the brake pipe, which indicates a brake application caused by the brake control valve **13**. The modification adds the BCP graduated release valve member **53** to allow for incremental exhaust to provide proper and responsive operation in a graduated release mode. The RGV **50** can thus operate properly in either a pneumatic graduated release system or with ECP brake control. The RGV **50** is shown in the release position in FIG. 4, and all functions and pressures can be identical with the standard proportioning valve **10** in this same position. Note that the additional parts incorporated into the standard proportioning valve **10** to make the RGV **50** can be relatively small in size. This reduces both cost and weight, and is all that is needed because only a small exhaust passage is required to follow the relatively slow release of the brake control valve **13**, which is so choked that brake cylinder pressure can not be exhausted faster than auxiliary reservoir pressure can be restored.

As shown in FIG. 5, this embodiment of the RGV **50** can generally be comprised of two main parts: a bushing **56** which is inserted through a hole **68** in the top cover **58** of the RGV and tightened into place with a retaining nut **59**; and a valve assembly **60**, which can be a spring loaded stem **61** with a seat **62**, which can be integral. The seat **62** seals on the top surface of the rubber diaphragm **40**, and when pulled away from the diaphragm **40** will vent the control volume **31** above the diaphragm **40** to atmosphere through a small hole **64**. The bushing includes a static seal **66** and the hole **68** in the top cover **58** can be machined with a proper chamfer to permit the seal **66** to function. Furthermore, machining of the hole **68** can be done so as to maintain fairly tight control, for example, +/-0.003 inch, of linear tolerances to help insure that the valve assembly **60** will function reliably.

The graduating valve member **53** can also include a cap **70** which can both fix the stroke of the valve stem **61** and provide a shield against the entrance of dirt and moisture. It can be seen that the compressed valve spring **72** holds the valve seat **62** against the rubber top of the diaphragm **40**, sealing the control volume **31** above the diaphragm **40**

against leakage through a central passageway 74 provided in the valve stem 61. This will be the case as the proportioning piston 25 and diaphragm 40 move downward from the full open position through the range of travel identical to the available valve travel illustrated. This available travel is such that until the proportioning piston 25 is below the balance position, and about halfway to the over travel position, the valve assembly 60 will remain closed. However, when the proportioning piston 25 moves lower than this, the available travel will be used up and the valve stem 61 will no longer be able to follow the diaphragm 40 and proportioning piston 25 down. Thus, as the proportioning piston 25 nears the over travel position (which can only happen when supply pipe pressure from the brake control valve 13 is being reduced and BCP is not) the valve assembly 60 will open and begin venting the control volume 31 to atmosphere 19a via central passageway 74, and with it brake cylinder pressure.

However, as this venting occurs the force urging the proportioning piston 25 downward will lessen at a greater rate than brake cylinder supply pressure, until the proportioning piston 25 moves upward to the balanced position, returning the graduated release valve member 53 to its closed position. This action will continue until the pressure at which the load sensor valve 22 returns to release, after which control volume 31 pressure will all be vented to atmosphere 19 via the load sensor valve 22, and the brake cylinder supply check valve 34 will be pulled open.

Referring now to FIG. 6, another embodiment of a RGV 80 according to the invention is illustrated. In this embodiment, the graduated release valve member 83 can essentially be a pressure-balanced spool valve actuated by the proportioning piston 25, in concert with the existing BCP supply check valve 37. In the configuration illustrated, the graduated release valve member 83 is positioned above the proportioning piston 25. Alternatively, the graduated release valve member 83 could be positioned beneath the proportioning piston 25. In either case the graduated release valve member 83 is closed when the proportioning piston 25 is positioned at or above the closure point of the supply check valve 37. There is a dead lap zone where both the graduated release valve member 83 and the proportioning valve 80 are closed, as the proportioning piston 25 moves incrementally downward from the supply valve threshold seating position. Further downward movement of the proportioning piston 25 beyond this small lap zone will cause the graduated release valve member 83 to open and directly exhaust downstream BCP.

As BCP is being developed or increased, the proportioning valve portion of the RGV 80 works exactly as described above for the standard proportioning valve 10. However, if the upstream BCP is incrementally exhausted at the brake control valve 13 (not shown in this figure) at any time, the reduced pressure beneath the balanced proportioning piston 25 will cause the proportioning piston 25 to move downward, under the influence of the opposing downstream BCP, which will open the graduated release valve member 83 to begin to reduce downstream pressure to the degree needed to rebalance the proportioning piston 25. The proper proportioning between the upstream and downstream BCP will thereby be automatically maintained for either incremental increases or decreases in the upstream pressure, as directly controlled, for example, by a brake control valve 13. With the RGV 80, the brake control valve 13 can be either a graduated release pneumatic type, or a direct electronic type, such as an ECP control unit.

As explained previously in regard to the operation of the conventional proportioning valve 10, the equalizing reservoir (not shown) is connected to the downstream BCP at the load sensor valve 22 (not shown here), and equalizing reservoir pressure will follow the BCP for all such graduations. If the upstream BCP is reduced below the equivalent of a minimum brake application, for example approximately 10 psi BCP, the brake control valve 13, or ECP unit, will normally provide a complete and direct release of BCP to zero. This will result in a reset of the load sensor valve 22, and the exhaust of the equalizing reservoir.

Referring now to FIGS. 7-8B, an embodiment of a graduated release valve member 83 is illustrated which can prevent blowout of an O-ring valve seal 85, and can be made capable of reliable operation in the service anticipated. FIG. 7 shows the parts of the graduated release valve member 83 in both the open position (left view) and the closed position (right view), along with the diaphragm 40 of the proportioning valve 80 which is driving the graduated release valve member 83. The spool 87 can be very slightly biased in the downward direction by the diameter of the upper spool O-ring 90. Also, a slight downward bias can be added by providing a low rate spring (not shown) on top of the spool 87.

As shown, the graduated release valve member 83 can comprise the central spool 87 and a housing 93 for the spool 87. The spool 87 is shown on the right of the centerline 96 in the extreme upper position 120, where the spool 87 would be in all cases where there was no pressure above the diaphragm 40, such as any loaded car condition, and also an empty car with brakes released, or insufficiently applied to move the proportioning piston 25 down. The spool 87 is shown to the left of the centerline 96 in the full down position 122, as would be the case after a brake application on an empty car had been made and partially released.

Note that the housing 93 carries the O-ring valve seal 85 near the bore entry, and that the spool 87 is drilled to provide an overbalance pressure on the proportioning piston 25. Also, in the position shown to the right of the centerline 96, the captive O-ring 85 seals the communication between the control volume 31 above the diaphragm 40, and atmosphere 19a. In the position at the left, the groove 99 in the spool 87 allows pressure above the diaphragm 40 in the control volume 31 to vent to atmosphere. The path to atmosphere is past the O-ring 85 into the groove 99 in the spool 87, out through the drilled cross hole 102 in the housing 93, and thence to the atmosphere 19a through the drilled cross hole 104 in the lower skirt of the retaining nut 106.

The diagram to the right of the centerline 96 shows the position of the top of the diaphragm 40 not only in these two positions, but also in two other positions of interest. The first of these two other positions is the "empty car lap" position 124. This is the position of the top of the diaphragm 40 when the brake is applied and RGV 80 has admitted sufficient air to the brake cylinder 16 to satisfy the design balance pressure differential of the proportioning piston 25. In this position, the spool 87 is still above the "cracking point" 126, for example by about 0.040 inch, so there should be no exhaust at or near the normal operating position of the RGV 80.

Beneath this point is the cracking point 126, where the graduating release valve member 83 is just sealed by a hair line, and beneath that is the lowermost, over travel position 128 of the diaphragm 40, which normally occurs while the brake cylinder supply is being released and the proportioning check valve 37 is being held on the seat because the brake cylinder supply pressure is still above actual brake

cylinder pressure. All travel from the cracking point **126** to the maximum over travel position **128** opens the graduating release valve member **83** wider, and at the over travel position **128** the valve **83** opening is approximately the equivalent of 0.100 inch, which should provide adequate exhaust capacity to reduce the brake cylinder pressure in step with a graduated brake release.

Referring more particularly to FIGS. **8A** and **8B**, one of the features of this embodiment of the graduated release proportioning valve member **83** is the way in which the sealing O-ring **85** near the housing entrance is retained against blowout when the valve **83** is opening. This O-ring and the retention members are shown enlarged in the figures, which show the spool **87** in both the cracking position **126** (FIG. **8A**), and the maximum over travel position **128** (FIG. **8B**), which are as defined in connection with FIG. **7**. A shown in FIG. **8b**, where the O-ring **85** is at the cracking position **126**, the O-ring **85** ring is captured between an upper retainer **110** and a lower retainer **116**. The upper retainer **110** has a vent passage **112** behind the O-ring **85**. So long as the O-ring **85** is in the annular groove **114**, this small vent **112** passes no air. However, if the O-ring **85** attempts to leave the annular groove **114** this vented area prevents pressure from building up behind the O-ring **85**, thus inhibiting the O-ring **85** from blowing out during valve opening. With this feature, seal pinching and excess wear should be avoided, and an extremely simple low cost valve mechanism can thereby be provided. The lower retainer **116** includes a skirt portion **118**. While the lower, or valve seat O-ring **85** is referred to as "captive," the purpose of the skirt **118** below the O-ring **85** is not solely to "capture" the O-ring **85**. One purpose of the skirt **118** is to assure repeatability in the position of the spool **87** at which the valve cycles, or seals. Another purpose of the skirt **118** is to prevent distortion of the O-ring **85** when the valve opens. The pressure acting on the O-ring when the valve is open will tend to draw the O-ring out from between the upper **110** and lower **116** retainers, causing the O-ring **85** to distort into a generally oval shape. The skirt **118** supports the outside of the O-ring **85**, and prevents, or at least minimizes, such distortion.

The material of the housing **93** can be 401 stainless in order to provide both corrosion protection and a good honed finish for the balance seal **120** to run on. Material for the spool **87** can be manganese bronze, to provide freedom from galling as well as physical strength and an O.D. ground finish to ride on the sealing O-ring **85**. Both seal retainers **110**, **116** can be stainless as well, and the retaining nut **106** can be free machining steel. All of the O-rings can be made of Viton, for both temperature and wear properties, although flourosilicon could also be used.

While the invention has been described in regard to certain specific embodiments as integrated with a conventional proportioning valve, it is to be understood that other embodiments can be utilized with other style or design of valves. In particular, other embodiments could comprise a totally new proportioning valve body, and valve parts could be used to incorporate the release graduating valve member according to the invention. Also, while the embodiments shown may use components such as those made or sold by Westinghouse Air Brake Company™, it is to be understood that other valves, including valves made by other entities, may also be used to obtain the invention described herein.

Moreover, although certain embodiments of the invention have been described in detail, it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that various modifications to those details could be developed in light of the overall teaching of this disclosure. Accordingly, the particular embodiments dis-

closed herein are intended to be illustrative only and not limiting to the scope of the invention which should be awarded the full breadth of the following claims and any and all embodiments thereof.

What is claimed is:

1. A release graduating proportioning valve for a rail car brake system having a brake pipe, a brake cylinder, and a load sensor valve for detecting an empty/loaded car condition, said release graduating proportioning valve comprising:

- a. a proportioning piston having a control volume communicating on a first side of said piston and a second volume communicating on a second side of said piston;
- b. said load sensor valve having an empty car setting in which said control volume is connected to atmosphere via said load sensor valve, and a loaded car setting in which said control volume is connected to said brake cylinder via said load sensor valve;
- c. a graduated release valve member interposed between said control volume and atmosphere, said graduated release valve member having an open position at which said control volume is connected to atmosphere via said graduated release valve member, said graduated release valve member having a closed position at which said graduated release valve member does not connect said control volume to atmosphere; and
- d. said graduated release valve being activated by movement of said proportioning piston.

2. The release graduating proportioning valve of claim **1** further comprising:

- a. said control volume located on an upper side of said proportioning piston;
- b. said graduated release valve member disposed through a top of said release graduating proportioning valve such that a first end of said graduated release valve member is disposed in said control volume and a second end of said graduated release valve member communicates with atmosphere; and
- c. said open position of said graduated release valve resulting from movement of said proportioning piston a sufficient distance in a direction away from said first end.

3. The release graduating proportioning valve of claim **2** wherein said graduated release valve member further comprises:

- a. a housing; and
- b. a spool member movably disposed in said housing, said first end being an end of said spool member which extends from said housing into said control volume.

4. The release graduating proportioning valve of claim **3** further comprising a spring member biasing said spool member toward a closed position in which said control volume is not connected to atmosphere by said graduated release valve member.

5. The release graduating proportioning valve of claim **3** wherein said graduated release valve member further comprises:

- a. a graduated release valve member o-ring retainer, said retainer having upper and lower valve seat positioners, said o-ring disposed therebetween;
- b. said lower positioner having a skirt portion which at least partially captures said o-ring; and
- c. said upper positioner having a vent passage communicating on a back side of said o-ring to inhibit a build up of pressure on said back side.

6. In an improved proportioning valve for an empty/load rail car brake system, the proportioning valve having a

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proportioning piston, a control volume communicating on a first side of said proportioning piston, and a second volume communicating on a second side of said proportioning piston, the improvement comprising:

- a. a graduated release valve member interposed between said control volume and atmosphere;
- b. said graduated release valve member having an open position at which said control volume is connected to atmosphere via said graduated release valve member, said graduated release valve member having a closed position at which said graduated release valve member does not connect said control volume to atmosphere; and
- c. said graduated release valve member activated by movement of said proportioning piston.

7. The improved proportioning valve of claim 6 further comprising:

- a. said control volume located on an upper side of said proportioning piston;
- b. said graduated release valve member disposed through a top of said release graduating proportioning valve such that a first end of said graduated release valve member is disposed in said control volume and a second end of said graduated release valve member communicates with atmosphere; and
- c. said open position of said graduated release valve resulting from movement of said proportioning piston a sufficient distance in a direction away from said first end.

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8. The improved proportioning valve of claim 7 wherein said graduated release valve member further comprises:

- a. a housing; and
- b. a spool member movably disposed in said housing, said first end being an end of said spool member which extends from said housing into said control volume.

9. The improved proportioning valve of claim 8 further comprising a spring member biasing said spool member toward a closed position in which said control volume is not connected to atmosphere by said graduated release valve member.

10. The improved proportioning valve of claim 8 wherein said graduated release valve member further comprises:

- a. a graduated release valve member o-ring retainer, said retainer having upper and lower valve seat positioners, said o-ring disposed therebetween;
- b. said lower positioner having a skirt portion which at least partially captures said o-ring; and
- c. said upper positioner having a vent passage communicating on a back side of said o-ring to inhibit a build up of pressure on said back side.

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