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Black

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(54) **PIN TUMBLER LOCK RELEASING METHOD**

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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 12/616,698, filed on Nov. 11, 2009, now Pat. No. 8,001,816.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
E05B 19/20 (2006.01)
E05B 27/04 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **70/394**; 70/395; 70/492

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 70/394, 70/337–343, 382–385, 492–93, 495–96, 70/400, 401, 395, 399; 33/540; 81/15.9
See application file for complete search history.

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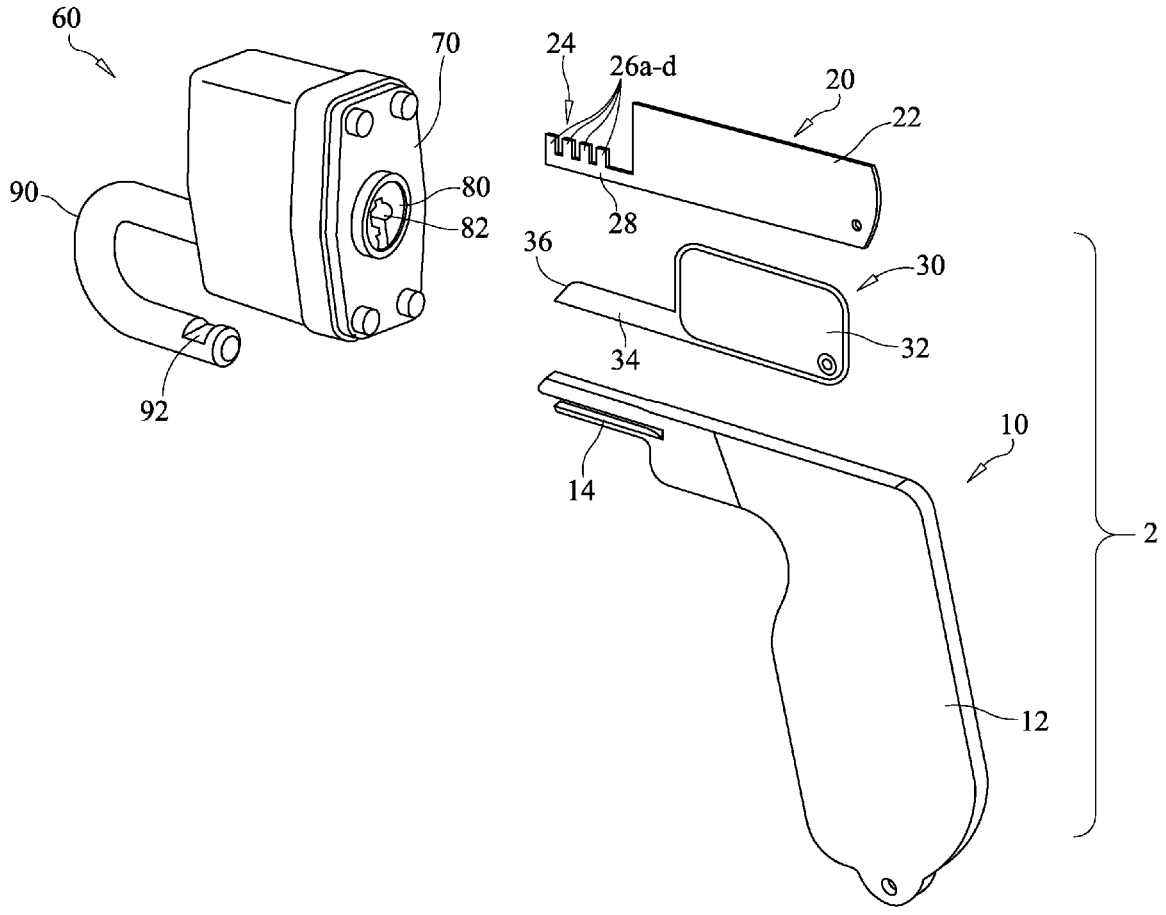
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A pin tumbler lock releasing method involves cooperatively using keyway insertible and universally configured lift, key and shim devices to raise the pin stacks within a pin tumbler lock to just above the lock's shear line and then rotating the lock's plug element within its outer easing in order to disengage its locking mechanism.

7 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



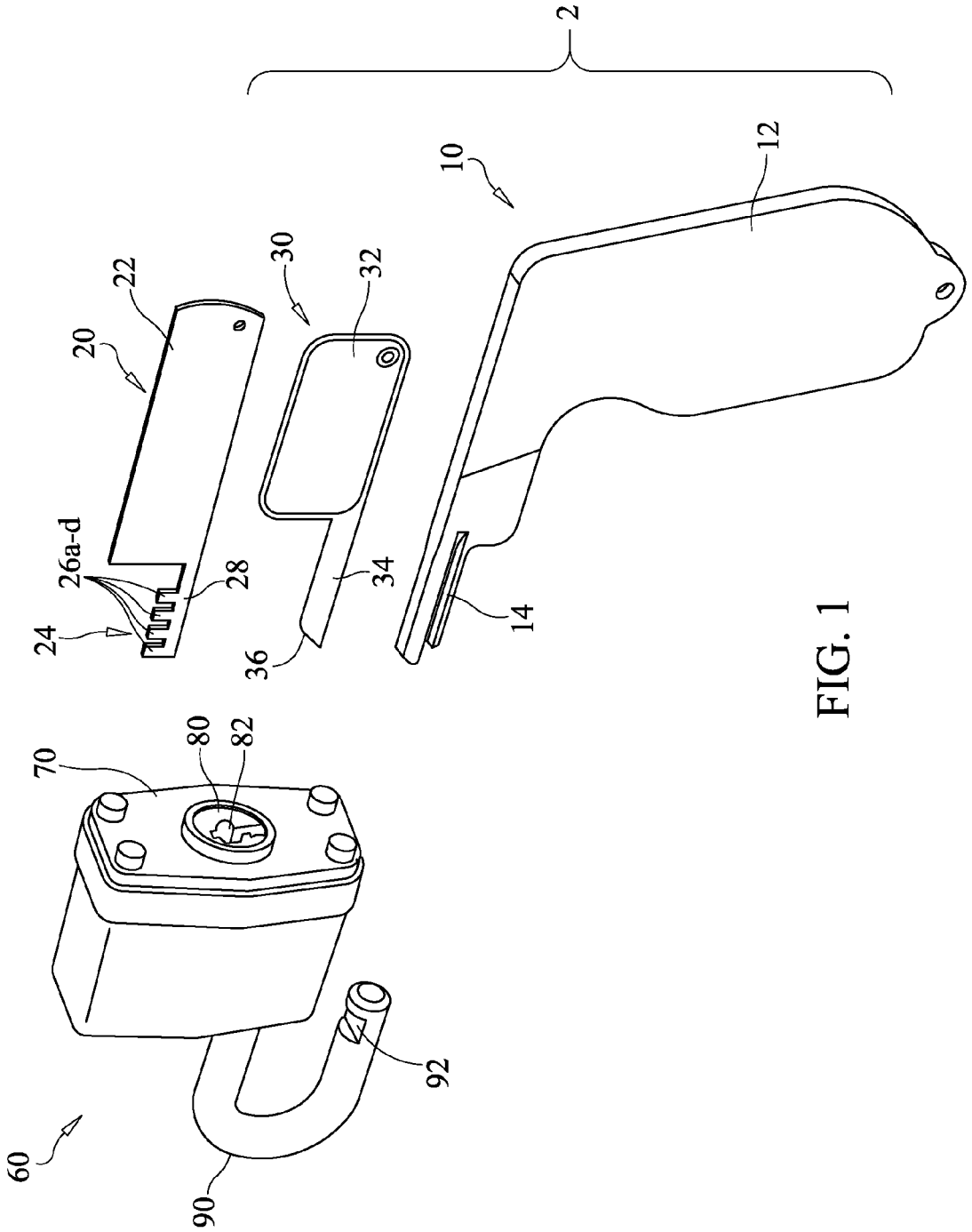


FIG. 1

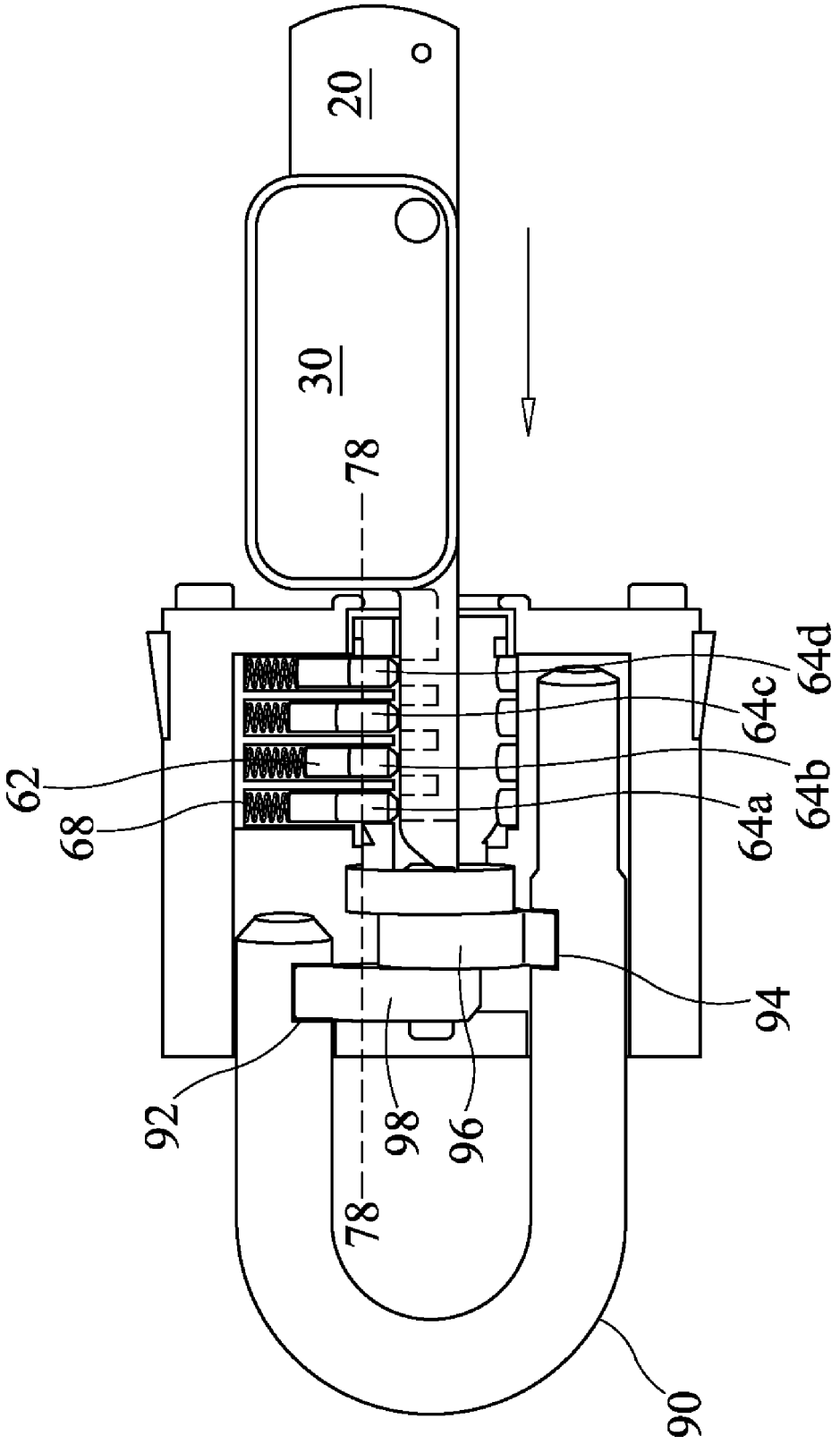


FIG. 2

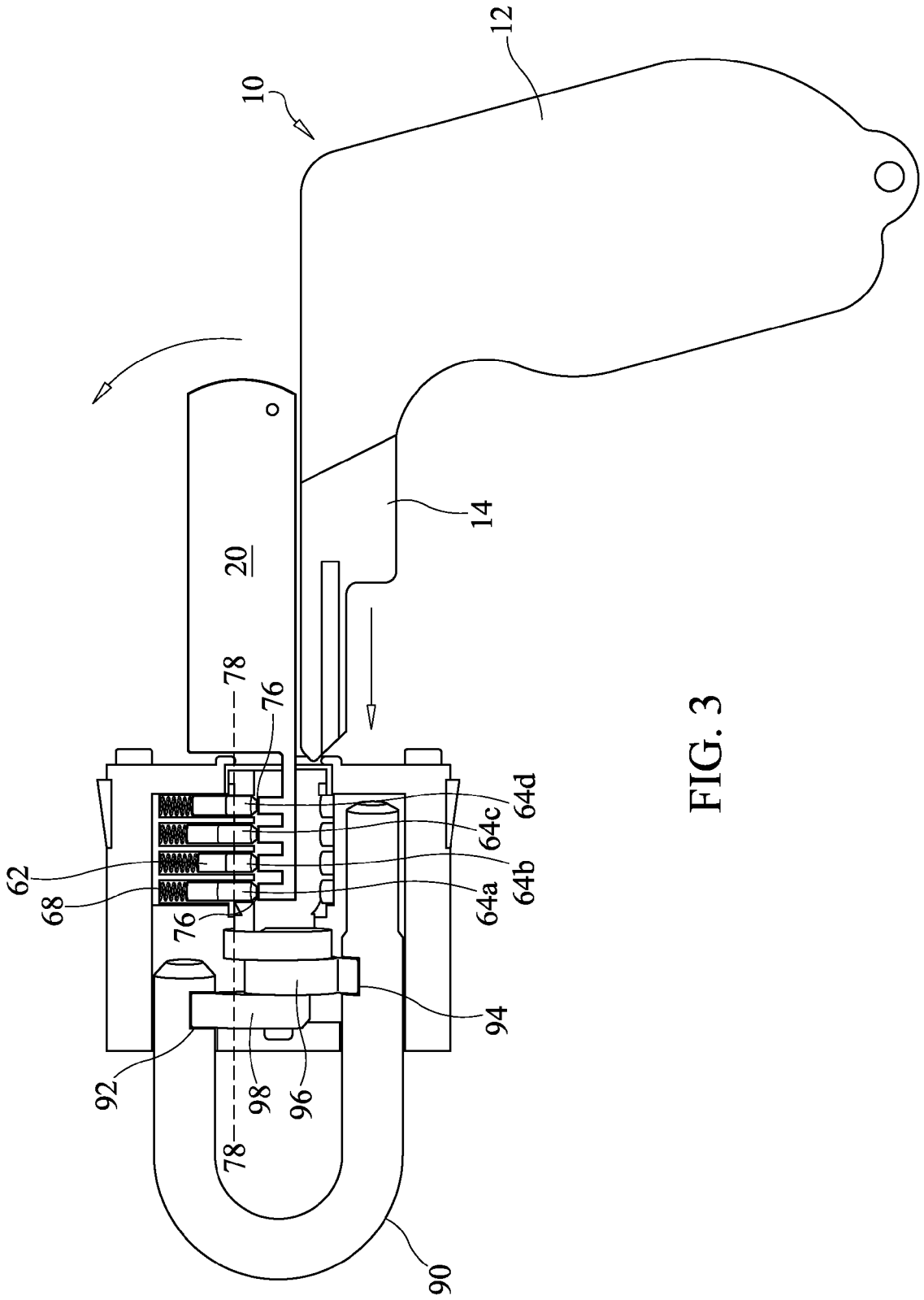


FIG. 3

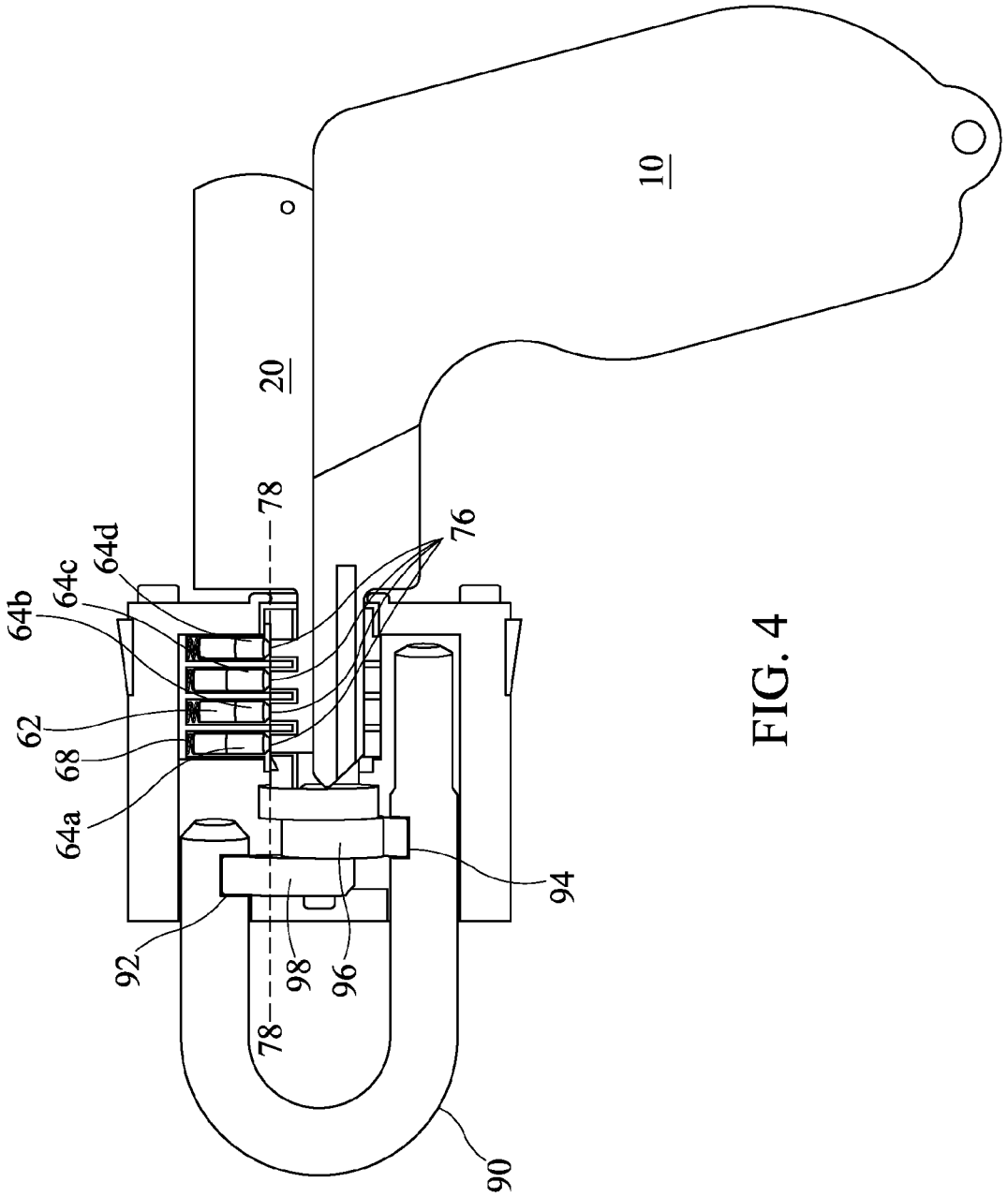


FIG. 4

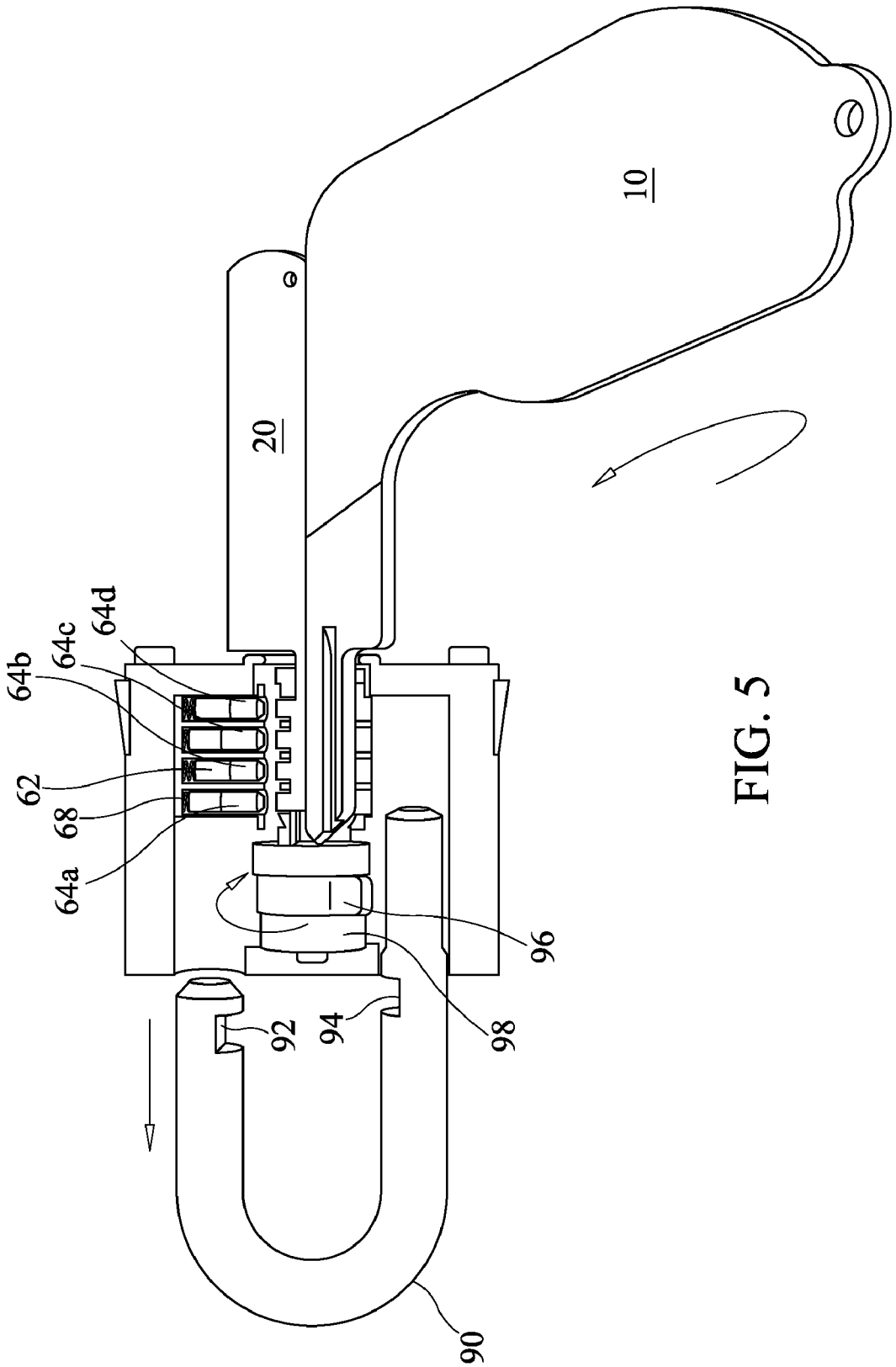


FIG. 5

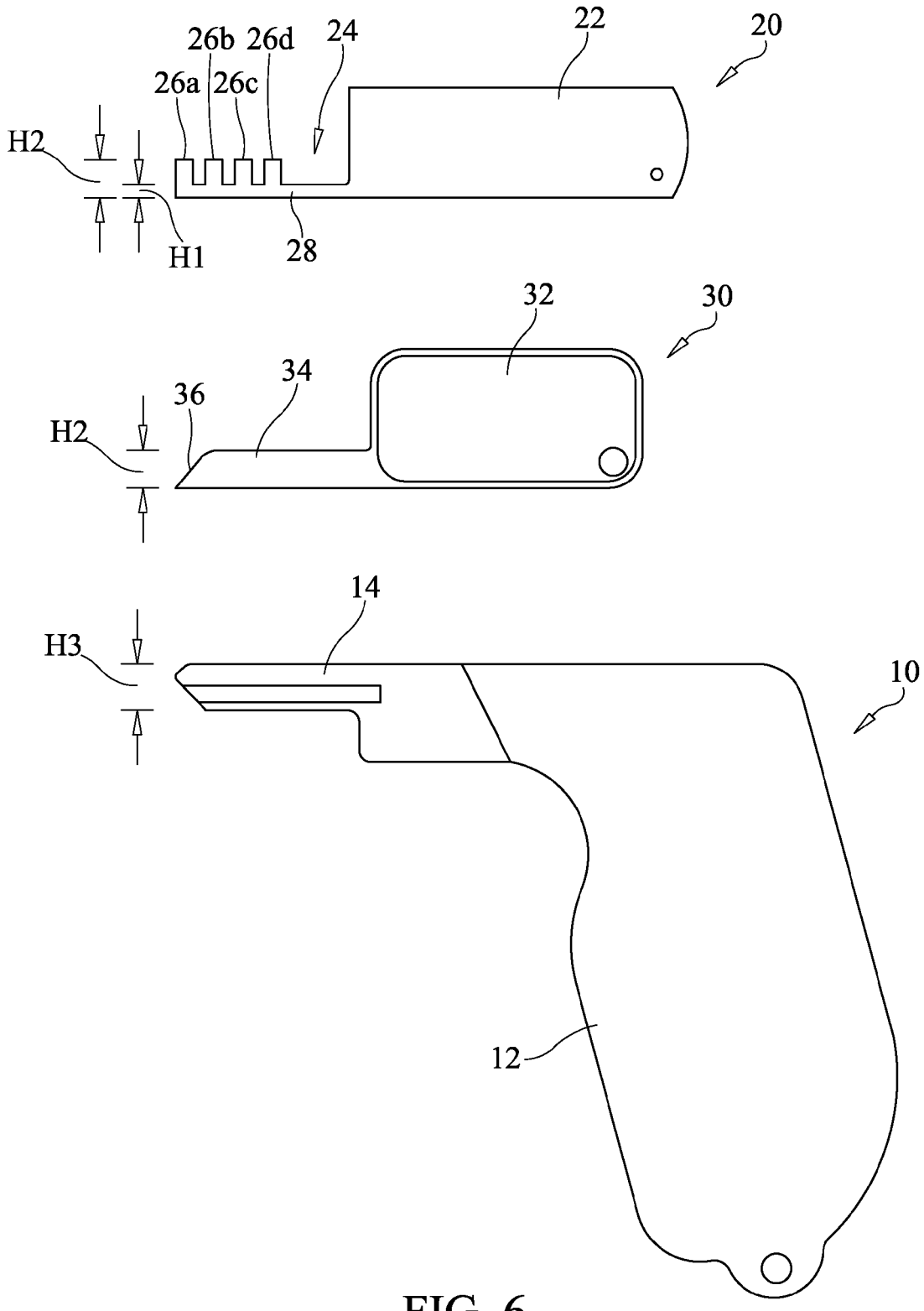


FIG. 6

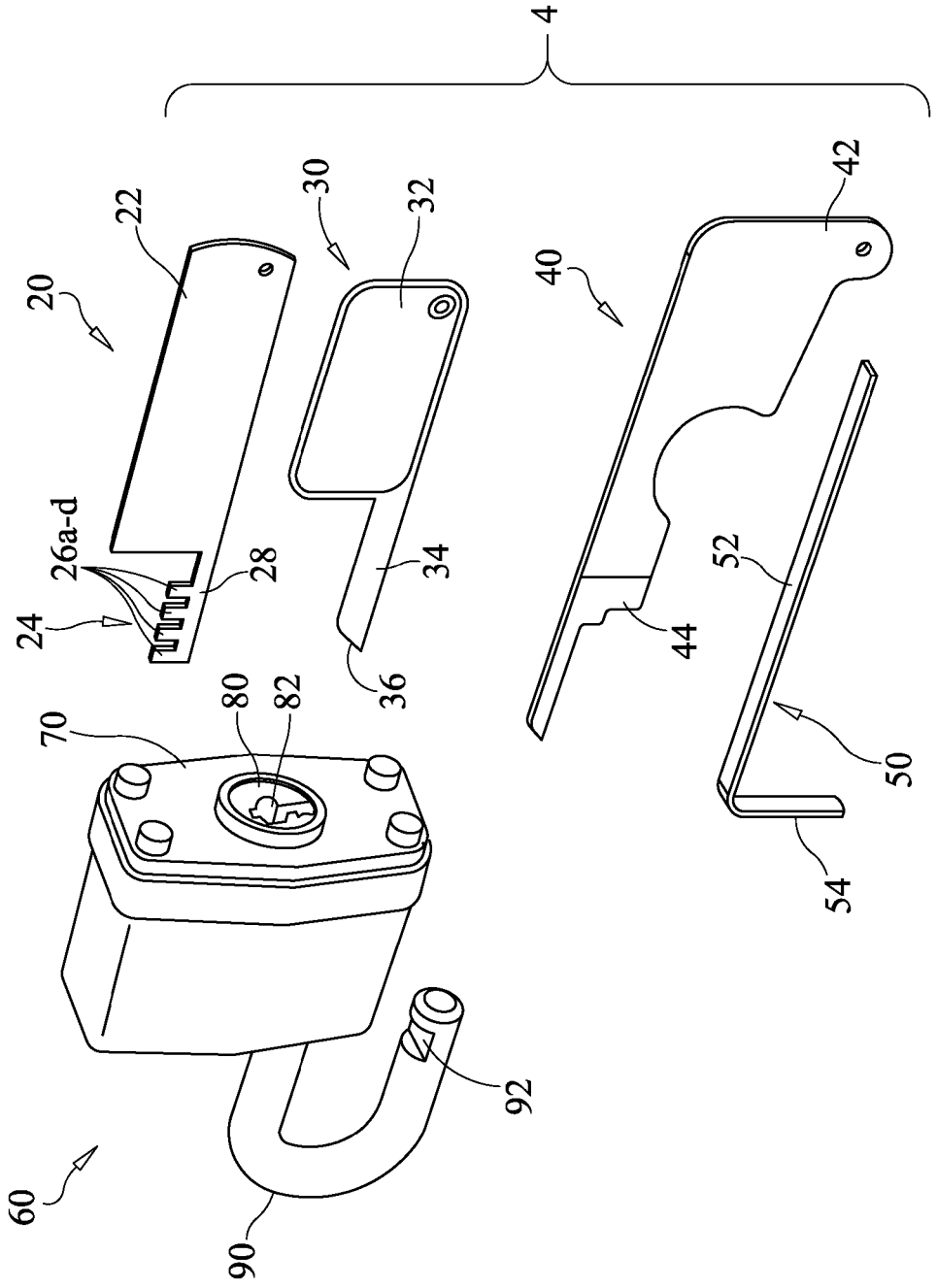


FIG. 7

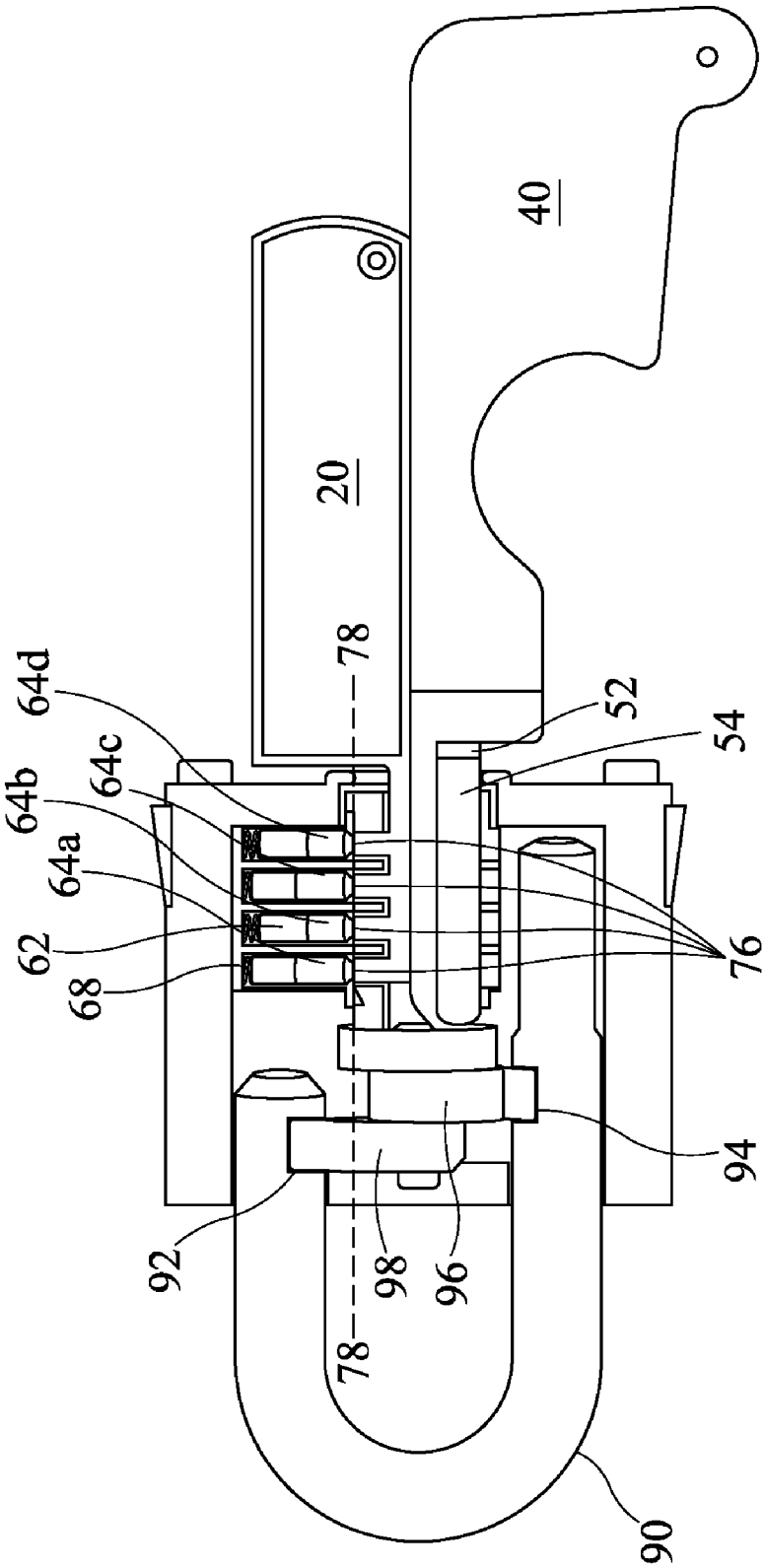


FIG. 8

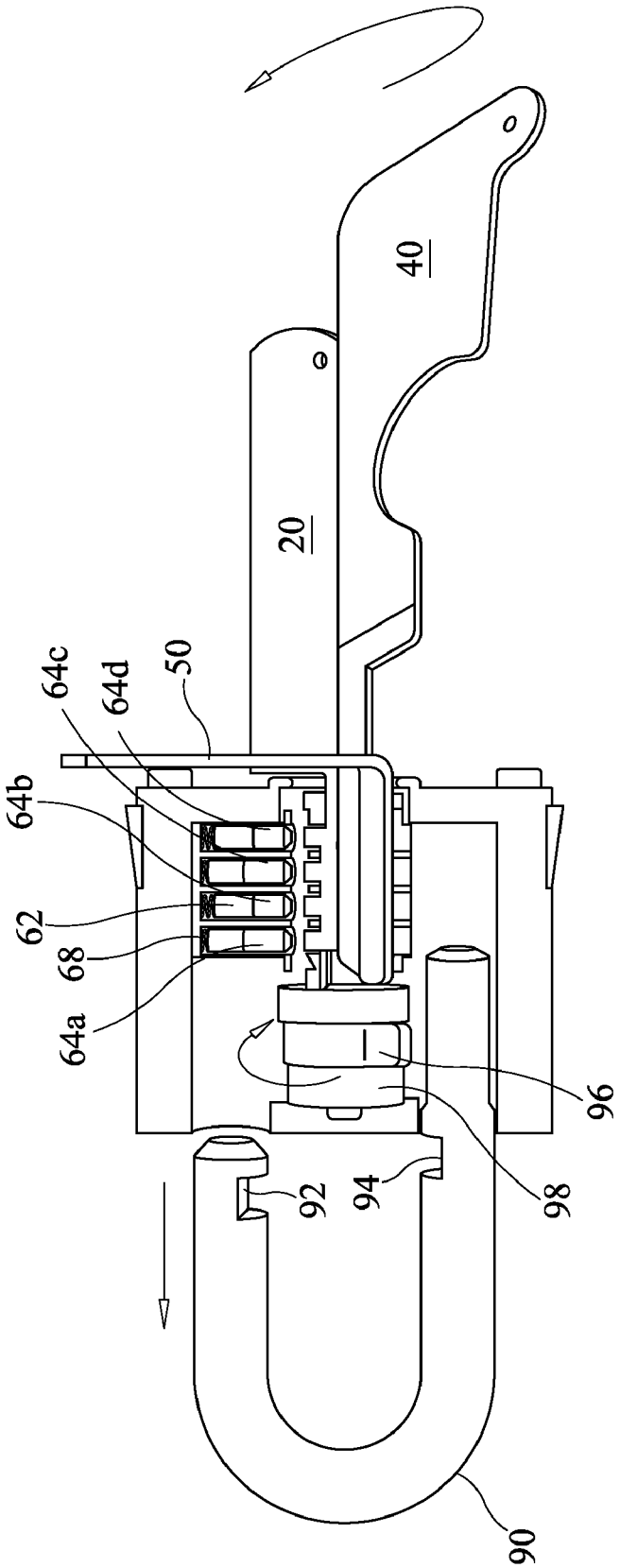


FIG. 9

PIN TUMBLER LOCK RELEASING METHOD

This application is a continuation that claims the benefit of application Ser. No. 12/616,698 filed Nov. 11, 2009. Furthermore, application Ser. No. 12/616,698 is hereby incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Pin tumbler locks generally feature four primary components: an outer casing, a plug, a locking mechanism and a series of parallel pin stacks. Formed through the casing is a cylindrical bore within which the cylindrical plug is rotatably housed. Opening at the front end of the plug is a slot, or "keyway," that extends axially into it and is configured to receive a key having a specific cut. At the rear end of the keyway typically is a lever or cam arrangement that actuates the locking mechanism to engage or release the lock upon relative rotation of the plug and casing. Formed within both the casing and plug is a parallel series of aligned holes (typically, four to six, but can be more or less) that open to the keyway and extend radially upward (when the keyway's front opening is vertically oriented) into the casing where their respective upper ends are closed. The plug and casing portions of these aligned holes meet along an imaginary plane line commonly referred to as the "shear line."

Within each aligned hole is a tumbler pin stack defined by a spring-loaded "driver pin" pressing downward against a sliding "key pin." When the keyway is empty (i.e., no key is within it) the bottom of each key pin rests along a short flange that juts into the keyway and runs transverse to the pin axis to prevent key pins sliding completely down into the keyway slot. The upper ends of the driver pins abut coil springs that force the driver pins, and therefore the key pins, down toward the keyway.

When no key is filling the keyway, either the driver pin or key pin within each pin stack straddles the shear line and thereby collectively prevent the plug from rotating within the casing. Moreover, because the key pins are not all uniform in length (the driver pins are), when a key that is not cut to operate with the specific lock at hand is inserted into the keyway, one or more of the key pins and/or driver pins will be positioned straddling the shear line. However, when the proper key is inserted, the flat top of each key pin will abut the bottom of its driver pin counterpart precisely at the shear line boundary between the plug and casing. This precise alignment of the pin contact surfaces with the shear line renders the pin stacks ineffective in inhibiting plug rotation so that the locking mechanism can be released by delivering torque to the plug via the key.

in situations in which a pin tumbler lock must be opened, but a properly cut key is not available to the lock owner, the owner or a locksmith will likely be forced to either destroy the lock or employ a lock "picking" or "bumping" technique in order to open a lock. Generally speaking, lock picking involves manipulation of all the existent pin stacks, in one-by-one sequence, until they are all aligned with the shear line so as to permit plug rotation. A variety of devices, ranging from crude took to more sophisticated instruments have been recognized as effective in picking pin tumbler and other types of locks. In contrast, lock bumping is a technique practiced exclusively on pin tumbler locks. Bumping basically involves utilization of a specially cut key to impart to the key pins and, in turn, to the driver pins an impact force that causes each driver pin and key pin pairing to momentarily separate such that all of the driver pins are elevated entirely above the shear line, while all key pins remain entirely below it. Bumping further requires that a rotational force be applied to the plug during that extremely brief moment of pin stack displacement.

That the present inventor is aware, known prior art techniques for opening a pin tumbler type lock without using a key that is cut specifically for it, be it picking techniques or bumping techniques, involve manipulating the pin stacks such that each driver pin ends up being disposed entirely within a lock's outer casing while each key pin is disposed entirely within its plug. Depending on the sophistication of the particular tools used, lock picking can be a tedious proposition simply due to the incremental manner in which each pin stack must be properly aligned with the shear line before the locking mechanism can be released. Lock bumping can also be difficult due to the delicateness and precise timing that may be needed in applying to the key pins an impact force of appropriate magnitude and direction to cause the desired separations of the key pins and driver pins about the shear line while also initiating plug rotation during the fleeting moment in which the pins are so displaced. Consequently, it can be appreciated that there exists a need for a new technique for opening pin tumbler locks that is an alternative to picking and bumping methods and can be performed without any expertise or skill. The present inventor submits that tools disclosed herein enable a user to practice such a technique and further submits that his conceived method for using them on a pin tumbler lock substantially fulfill this outstanding need.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention generally relates to non-destructive lock picking, and it is specifically directed to a method for using tools to release a lock of the "pin tumbler" type in a novel fashion that neither damages the lock nor requires use of a typical lock key.

It is an object of the present invention to provide a method for actuating release of any lock that employs a pin tumbler mechanism, and for doing so without the intended key. It is a further object that such a method be able to be practiced in an identical manner with equal effectiveness on a variety of pin tumbler locks, despite differences in their total numbers of tumbler pin stacks (e.g., 3-pin, 4-pin, 5-pin, etc.) and irrespective of their outer casing configurations (cylinders, padlocks, etc.).

It is an associated object of the present invention to utilize one or a combination of instruments in practicing the instant lock releasing method in a manner that a person possessing no adeptness whatsoever at lock picking easily can.

In one aspect of the invention, pin tumbler locks are opened in a manner that is quite unconventional in the respect that the instant method does not involve an aligning of driver and key pin contact surfaces with the imaginary shear line between the plug and outer casing elements of a pin tumbler lock, but rather involves using a system of instruments to press key pins beyond the plug's periphery and entirely into the outer casing, along with their abutting driver pins, so that the bottoms, not the tops, of the key pins become coplanar with the shear line. In distinguishing it from well-known picking and bumping techniques, the present inventor has coined the term "jamming" (as entire pin stacks are essentially "jammed" above the shear line) in reference to the pin tumbler lock releasing technique of the present invention.

In another aspect of the invention, the aforedescribed jamming technique can be manually implemented using one, two, or three distinct devices which include (1) a pin stack lifting tool, (2) a key having a uniformly toothed blade, and (3) a shim for providing underlying support for the key. Addi-

tionally, a fourth device, a common torque wrench, can be used to aid in turning a lock plug.

Preferably, the lift device comprises a handle as well as a blade that can be inserted into an upper portion of most pin tumbler lock keyways. The key device similarly comprises a handle and a blade that has the same vertical profile as that of the lift blade. However, along the key blade is a series of uniformly spaced teeth that are adapted to fit into the vertical holes formed within the lock plug (those in which pin stacks reside). The respective thicknesses of the blade portions of the lift and key devices are such that both blades snugly fit side-by-side into the keyway. The shim device also comprises a handle and blade, and it is configured so that its blade can be wedged underneath the key blade in order that the key teeth push the key pin bottoms up into alignment with the shear line. Finally, in some embodiments of the present invention, a torque wrench can be inserted into the keyway next to the shim device to provide the user a moment arm for transmitting torque that rotates the plug and disengages the lock.

should be noted that the term "blade," as it is used throughout this disclosure, generally denotes a portion of the pertinent instrument that is relatively elongate and is adapted to be inserted into a typical keyway, but does not necessarily imply anything regarding the contour or sharpness of the edge(s) of that portion nor any other of its structural aspects.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a side perspective view of a key, lift device and shim used to practice the preferred embodiment of the pin tumbler lock releasing method of the present invention, the view showing all three instruments distanced from a pin tumbler lock that is in a lock released state;

FIG. **2** is a side elevational view of the key and lift device, the view showing both instruments fully inserted into the lock, shown in cross-section, while it is in a locked state;

FIG. **3** is a side elevational view of the key and shim, the view showing the key fully inserted into the lock and the shim approaching the lock's keyway (with the key handle being motioned upward in order to accommodate shim insertion) while the lock, shown in cross-section, is in a locked state;

FIG. **4** is a side elevational view of the key and shim, the view showing both instruments fully inserted into the lock, shown in cross-section, while it is in a locked state;

FIG. **5** is a side elevational view of the key and shim, the view showing both instruments fully inserted into the lock and being rotated clockwise, causing the lock, shown in cross-section, to release;

FIG. **6** is a side elevational view of the key, lift device and shim;

FIG. **7** is a side perspective view of the key, lift device, shim and a torque wrench, the view showing all four devices distanced from a pin tumbler lock that is in a lock released state;

FIG. **8** is a side elevational view of the key and shim, the view showing both instruments fully inserted into the lock, shown in cross-section, while it is in a locked state; and

FIG. **9** is a side elevational view of the key and shim, the view showing both instruments fully inserted into the lock and being rotated clockwise, causing the lock, shown in cross-section, to release.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

This disclosure, as defined by the claims that follow and as illustrated, by way of example, in the accompanying drawings, relates to an apparatus system and method for releasing pin tumbler-type locks. Most of the accompanying drawings depict the system being used on a pin tumbler padlock **60**. This particular lock **60** comprises a cylindrical plug **80** disposed within an outer casing **70**. The lock **60** has a keyway **82** and four pin stacks that each comprise a driver pin **68** and a key pin **64** disposed within aligned vertical apertures, or "tumbler pin holes," formed within both its plug **80** and casing **70**. Coil springs **68** are mounted to both the closed top ends of the pin holes and the driver pins **68** to bias both pins **68**, **64** downward. The lock **60** also features a locking mechanism comprising a pair of oppositely oriented cams **96**, **98** that pivot, upon rotation of the plug **80**, to lock and release a spring-loaded shackle **90**. Nevertheless, pin tumbler locks adapted for use with dwelling doors (interior and exterior), vehicles, etc. may be releases using the present method.

It should be understood that the presently disclosed lock releasing method can be used to open of pin tumbler locks generally, and its relevance is not limited to pin tumbler-type locks of the particular configuration depicted in the accompanying drawings and described above and throughout this disclosure. In fact, the present method can be practiced on pin tumbler locks of varying features, such as differences in total numbers of tumbler pin stacks, in number of pins within individual stacks (e.g., some pin tumbler locks may include an additional "spacer" pin(s) situated between each driver pin and key pin) and in the configurations of their locking mechanisms. Of course, certain specifications of the instruments used to perform the present method may need to be varied accordingly.

FIG. **1** illustrates a three-piece system **2** that can be used to perform a preferred embodiment of the lock releasing method of the present invention. That system **2** comprising a key **20**, a lift device **30** and a shim **10** that all operate with the shown pin tumbler lock **60**. The key **20** comprises a handle portion **22** and an insert portion **24**, or blade. The key blade **24**, itself, comprises a rectangularly elongated base **28** that has multiple teeth **26** projecting upward from it. The number of teeth included on the key blade **24** can differ, as any given system key **20** will properly operate with only locks that feature the same number of tumbler pin stacks as the number of teeth **26** along that key **20**. So, for example, since the lock **60** shown in cross-section FIGS. **2-4** has four pin stacks, a suitable system key **20** will feature four teeth **26***a-d*. Furthermore, the height of the uniformly profiled key teeth **26***a-d*, as measured from troughs between teeth **26** (i.e., top borders of the key blade's base **28**), must be exactly equal to the length of the plug segment of a tumbler pinhole.

The lift device **30** also comprises a handle **32** and a blade **34**. As shown in FIG. **6**, the lift blade **34** features an arcuately beveled leading edge **36**, and it has the same vertical height H2 as does the key blade **24**. This enables the lift blade **34** to slide under and raise key pins **64** that are protruding down into the keyway **82**, as it escorts the key blade **24** into the keyway. The key blade **24**, if unaccompanied by the lift blade **32**, might not smoothly insert into the uppermost portion of the keyway **82** because of tooth jaggedness issues. Finally, the shim **10** also comprises a handle **12** and blade **14**. The shim blade **14** may be grooved to conform to a lower portion of a typical keyway.

The first step of the preferred "jamming" method of the present invention involves simultaneously inserting the key **20** and lift device **30** into an upper portion of the keyway **82**, as shown in FIG. **2**. Again, the lift blade **34** slightly raises the all four key pins **64***a-d* upward against their spring biases and provides clearance for the key blade **24**. Once fully inserted, each of the four key blade teeth **26***a-d* are aligned and in contact with one of the four key pins **64***a-d*, and the key pins

64*a-d* will generally be positioned partly within the plug **80** and partly within the outer casing **70** such that they straddle the lock's shear line **78**. Thus, the plug **80** and casing **70** remain held in fixed relation. As a next step, the lift device **30** can be withdrawn from the keyway **82** while the key **20** is steadily held in place.

Theoretically, the key **20** can then be carefully raised, without its handle **22** being rocked upward or downward, in order to press the key pins **64***a-d* in alignment with the shear line **78**. However, because that would require a user to manually exert precisely constant and identical upward pressure on every key pin **64***a-d* while simultaneously attempting to revolve the key handle **22** about an axis that is offset from the key handle's rotation axis, it is preferred that a shim device **10** be used as an underlying support for the key **20**. Therefore, as a third step shown in FIG. **3**, the blade **14** of the shim device **10** is slid into a lower portion of the keyway **82**. Depending upon the configurations of the key handle **20** and shim handle **12**, the key handle **20** may need to be momentarily rocked slightly upward to accommodate initial insertion of the shim blade **14**.

Because the sum of the height H**1** of the key blade base **20** and the height H**3** of the shim blade **14** (see FIG. **6**) is only very slightly less than the vertical width of the keyway **82** (giving them a slide clearance fit into the keyway **82**), the shim blade's insertion presses the key teeth **26***a-d* into their corresponding pin tumbler holes as illustrated in FIG. **4**. The shim's presence within the keyway **82** also stabilizes the key **20** and allows the user to manipulate only the shim handle **12** at this point. Moreover, because the key teeth **26***a-d* have height profiles equivalent to the lengths of the plug segments of the pin tumbler holes, as previously mentioned, the respective contact surfaces **76** between the key teeth **26***a-d* and the key pins **64***a-d* are elevated into precise alignment with the shear line **78**, and the cylindrical plug **80** ceases to be inhibited from rotating about its axis. No prior art of which the present inventor is aware discloses either devices or a method for raising a pin tumbler lock's pin pairs to that precise position and maintain them there without requiring any notable degree of skill or hand steadiness.

Finally, as a fourth step, the shim **10** is turned clockwise to transmit torque to the plug **80**. As the plug **80** is then rotated, the cams **96**, **98** also rotate and dislodge from conforming notches **94**, **92** along the shackle **90**. Consequently, one end of the spring-loaded shackle **90** releases from the casing **70** as shown in FIG. **5**.

Alternatively, and as illustrated in FIG. **7**, the present system **4** may include a fourth piece, in the form a typical torque wrench **50** having a handle portion **52** and insert portion **54**, that accompanies a key **20**, lift device **30** and shim **40**. The use method for this four-piece system **4** is executed exactly as that recited above for the three-piece system **2**, except that the insert portion **54** of the wrench **50** is inserted into the keyway horizontally adjacent and flush against the shim blade **44** (see FIG. **8**) so that the user can simply turn the torque wrench **50** to release the lock **60** as shown in FIG. **9**. Typically, the blade portion **44** of a shim device **40** used in this alternative four-piece system **4** will have a shorter vertical profile and a lesser thickness profile than does its counterpart used in the preferred system **2**. This dimensioning enables the shim blade **44** to insert below any inward flange that might exist along the keyway **82** and be completely flush against and symmetric with the adjacently inserted portion **54** of the torque wrench **50**. Of course, in order to stably cooperate with such a vertically shorter shim blade **44**, the height H**1** of the key blade base **28** that it supports should be proportionately increased.

It is understood that substitutions and equivalents for and combinations of various elements set forth above may be obvious to those skilled in the art and may not represent a departure from the spirit of the invention. Therefore, the full scope and definition of the present invention is to be set forth by the claims that follow.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for unlocking a pin tumbler lock defined by a plug disposed within a casing, a series of aligned vertical holes formed within the plug and casing, spring-loaded driver pins and corresponding key pins disposed within the aligned holes such that the plug can be rotated relative to the casing when respective contact surfaces between the driver pins and key pins are aligned with a shear line between the plug and casing, a locking mechanism that releases upon relative rotation of the plug and casing, and a keyway horizontally formed within the plug, the method comprising:

inserting an insertion element into the keyway;

lifting the insertion element to urge the key pins and driver pins upward against their spring biases such that the key pins and driver pins are disposed outside the plug's periphery and respective contact surfaces between the insertion element and key pins are aligned with the shear line; and

rotating the plug relative to the casing to release the locking mechanism.

2. The method of claim **1**, wherein rotating involves applying a torque to said insertion element.

3. A method for unlocking a pin tumbler lock defined by a plug disposed within a casing, a series of aligned vertical holes formed within the plug and casing, spring-loaded driver pins and corresponding key pins disposed within the aligned holes such that the plug can be rotated relative to the casing when respective contact surfaces between the driver pins and key pins are aligned with a shear line between the plug and casing, a locking mechanism that releases upon relative rotation of the plug and casing, and a keyway horizontally formed within the plug, the method comprising:

inserting first and second elements into the keyway so that they simultaneously contact key pins;

lifting the second element to further urge key pins and driver pins upward against their spring biases such that the key pins and driver pins are disposed outside the plug's periphery and respective contact surfaces between the second element and key pins are aligned with the shear line; and

rotating the plug relative to the casing to release the locking mechanism.

4. The method of claim **3**, wherein rotating involves applying a torque to said second element.

5. The method of claim **3**, further comprising withdrawing said first element from the keyway prior to lifting said second element.

6. A method for unlocking a pin tumbler lock defined by a plug disposed within a casing, a series of aligned vertical holes formed within the plug and casing, spring-loaded driver pins and corresponding key pins disposed within the aligned holes such that the plug can be rotated relative to the casing when respective contact surfaces between the driver pins and key pins are aligned with a shear line between the plug and casing, a locking mechanism that releases upon relative rotation of the plug and casing, and a keyway horizontally formed within the plug, the method comprising:

inserting first and second elements into the keyway to urge the key pins and driver pins upward against their spring biases;

withdrawing the first element from the keyway so that respective bottoms of the key pins are in contact with the second element;

inserting a third element into the keyway underneath the second element to urge the second element upward and further urge the key pins and driver pins upward against their spring biases such that the key pins and driver pins are disposed outside the plug's periphery and respective contact surfaces between the second element and key pins are aligned with the shear line; and

rotating the plug relative to the casing to release the locking mechanism.

7. The method of claim **6**, wherein rotating involves applying a torque to said third element,

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