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(54) **INSPECTION METHOD FOR THE EFFECT OF COMPOSITION ON THE BOND STRENGTH OF A METALLIZED ALUMINA CERAMIC**

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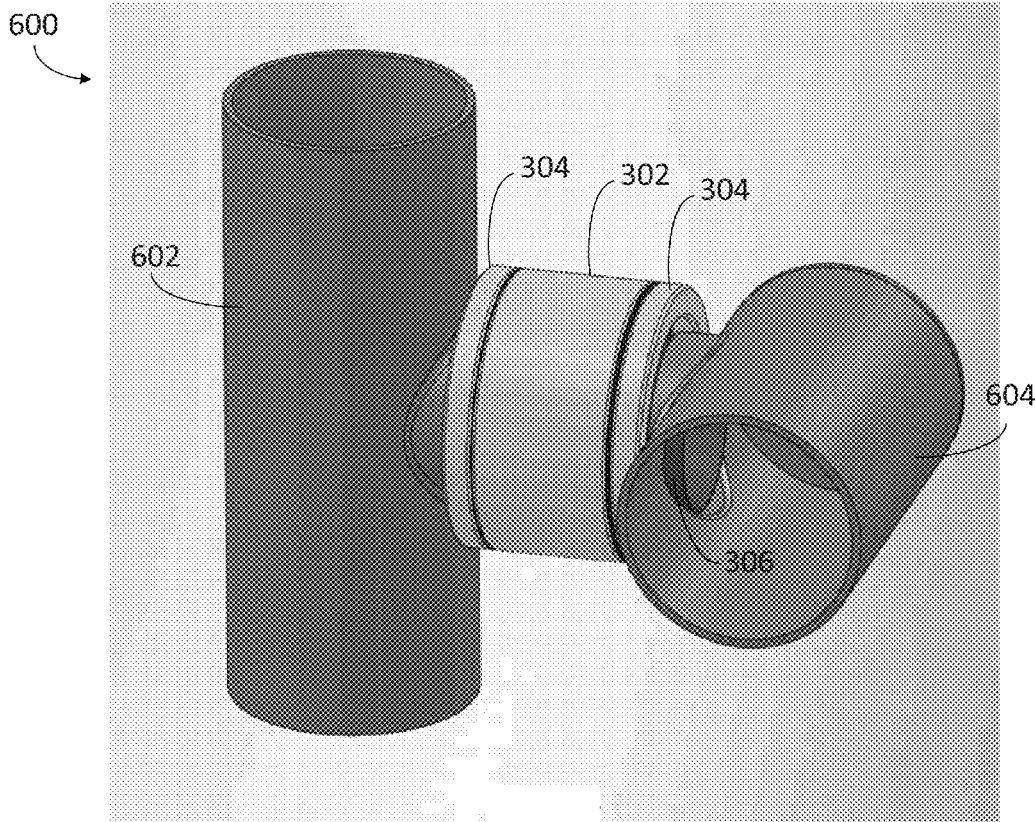
(57) **ABSTRACT**

(22) Filed: **Oct. 1, 2015**

A method of inspecting a unit under test containing brazed dielectric to metal bond, includes providing at least one image of the bond and determining a characteristic of the bond based on at least one of a presence and size of a glassy phase in or adjacent to the bond.

Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 62/086,938, filed on Dec. 3, 2014.



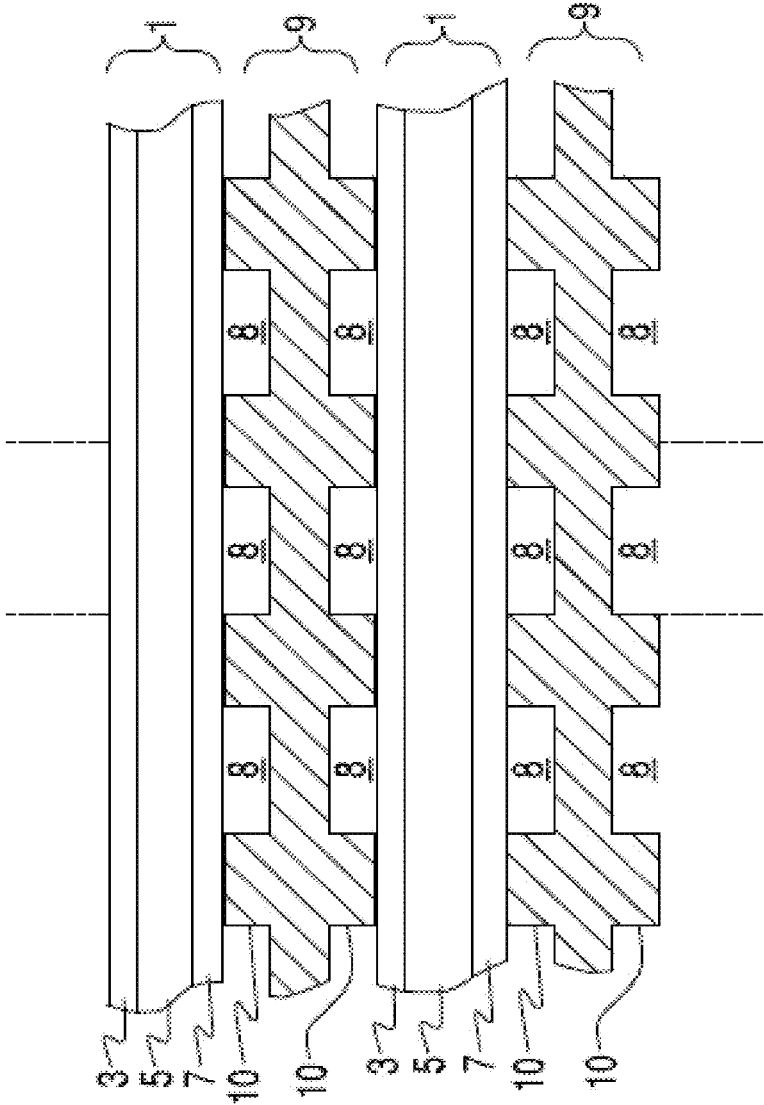


FIG. 1
Prior Art

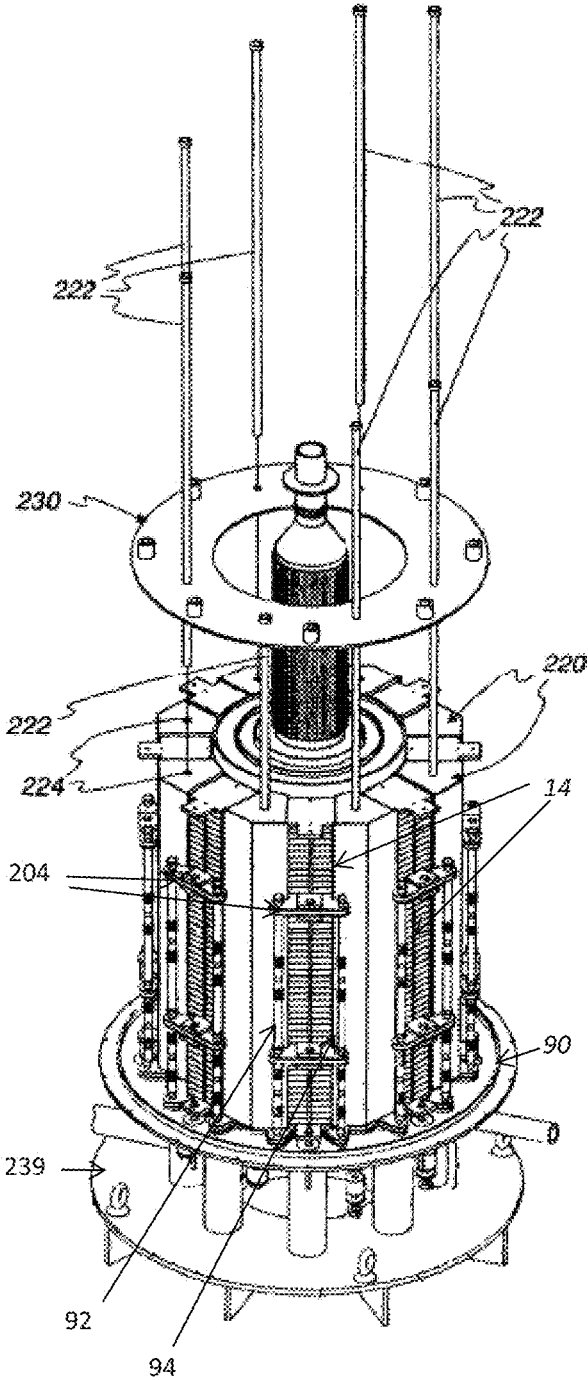


FIG. 2
Prior Art

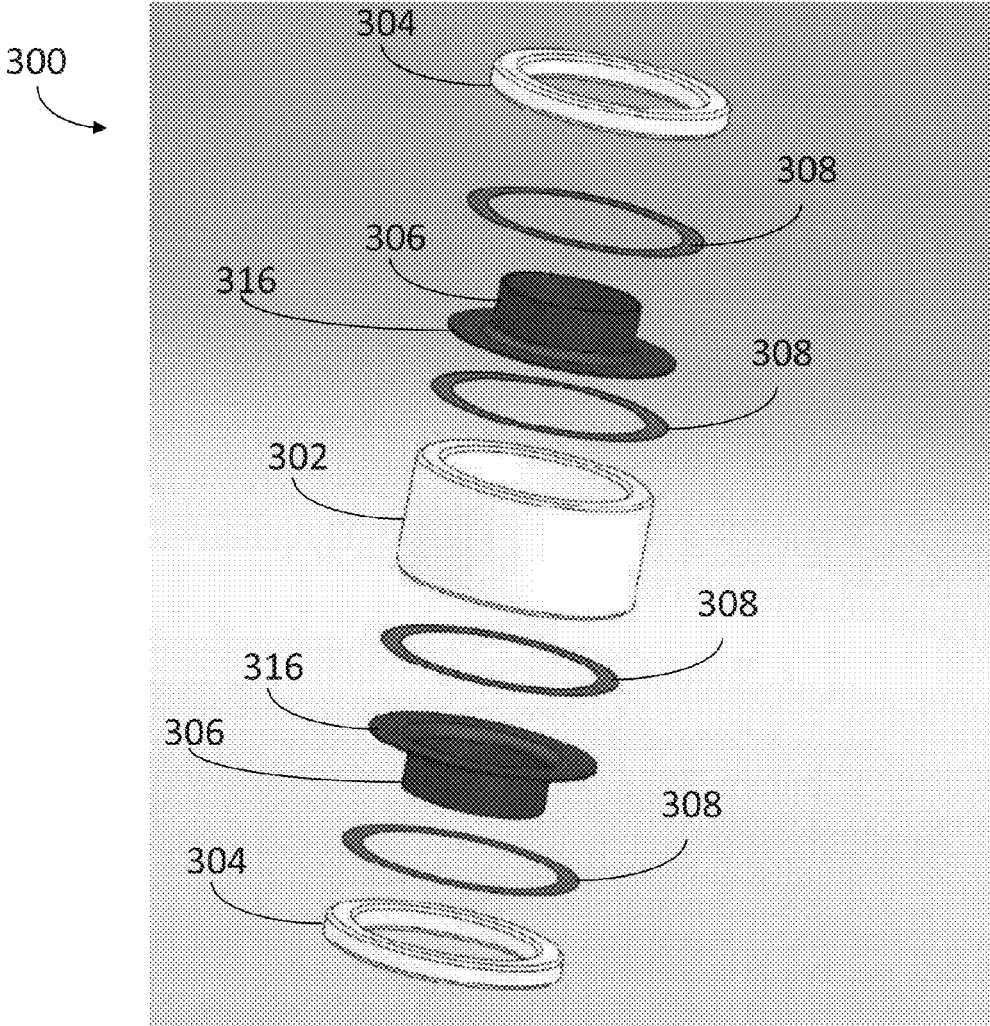


FIG. 3A

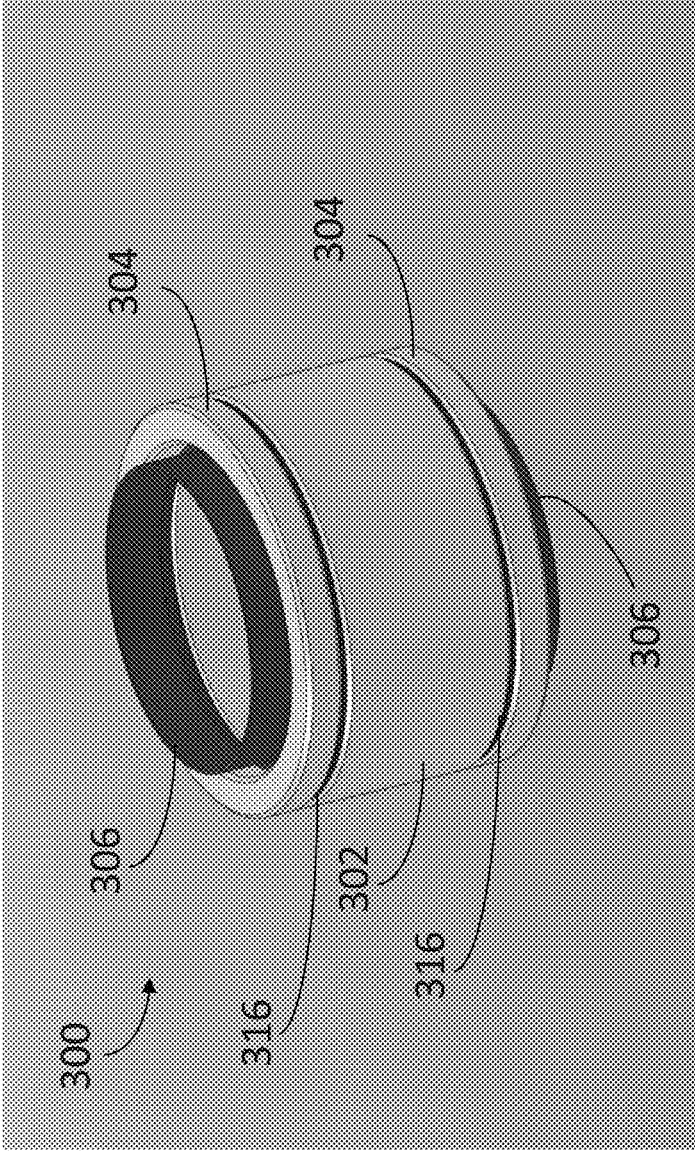
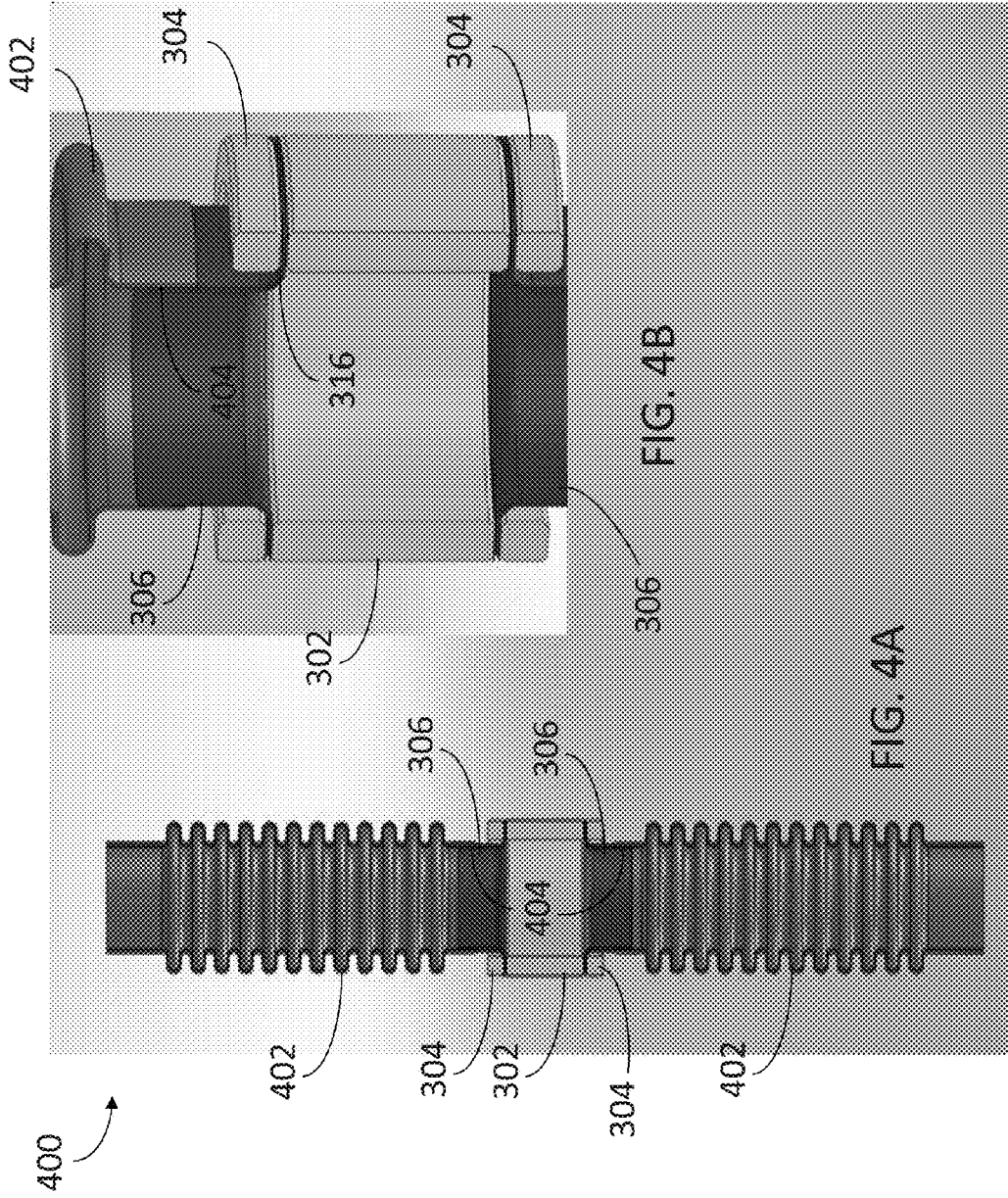
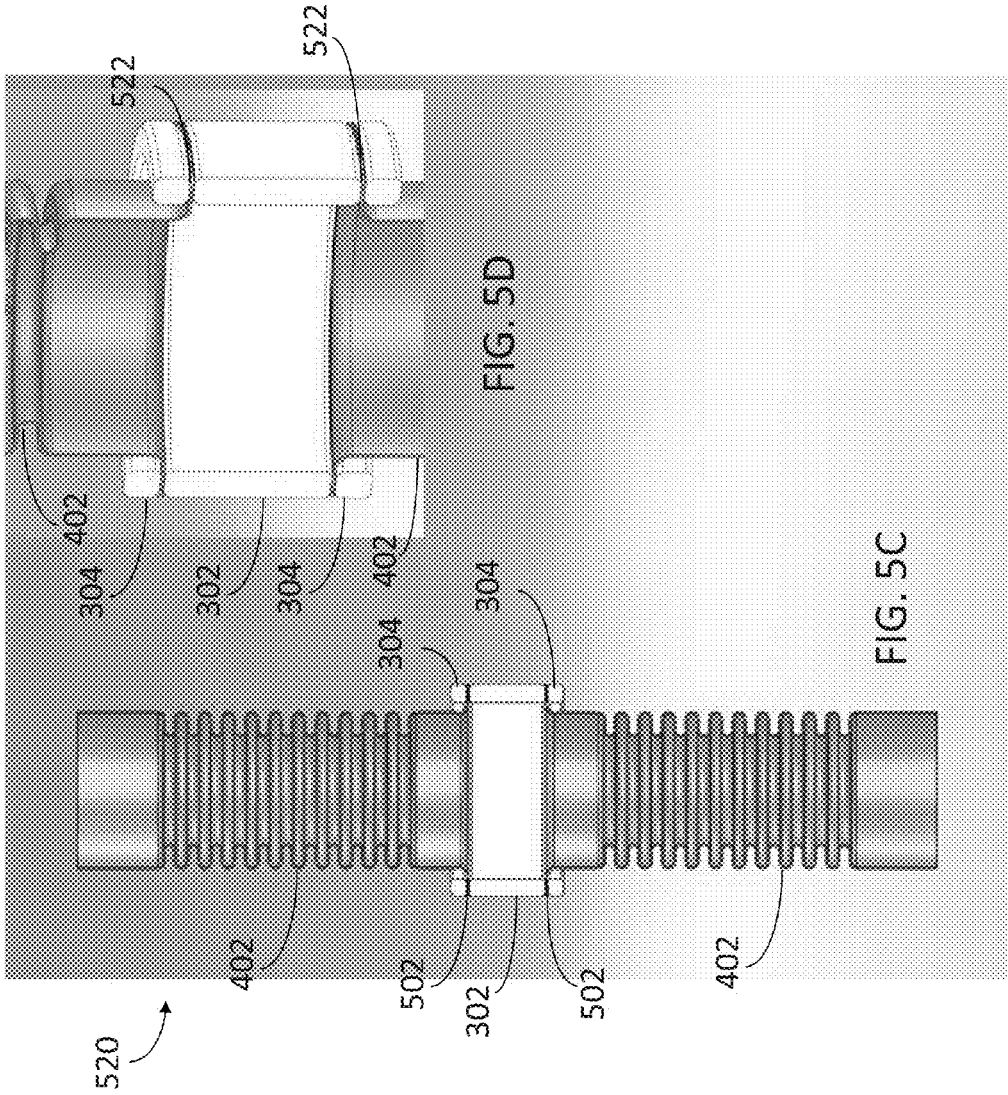


FIG. 3B





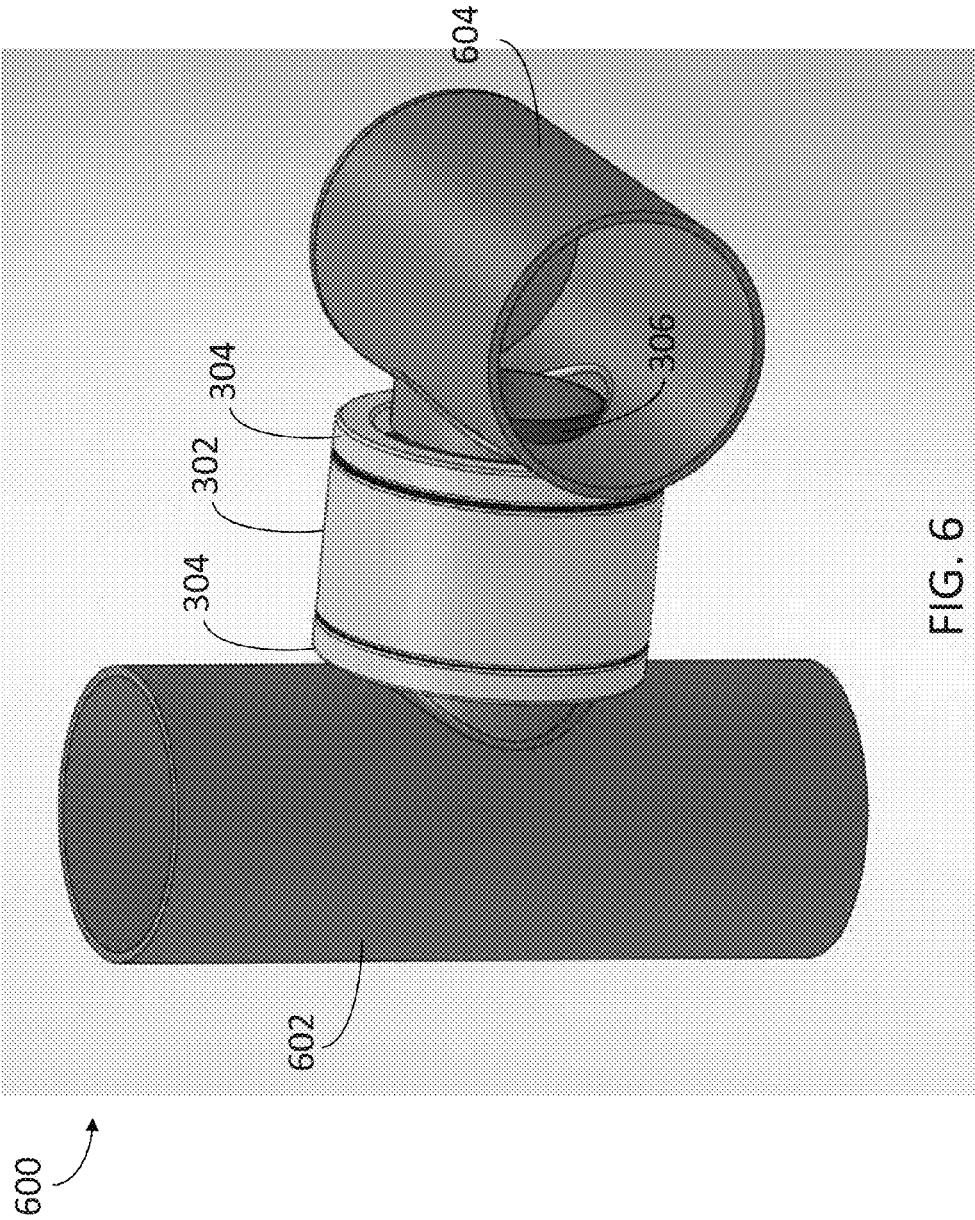


FIG. 6

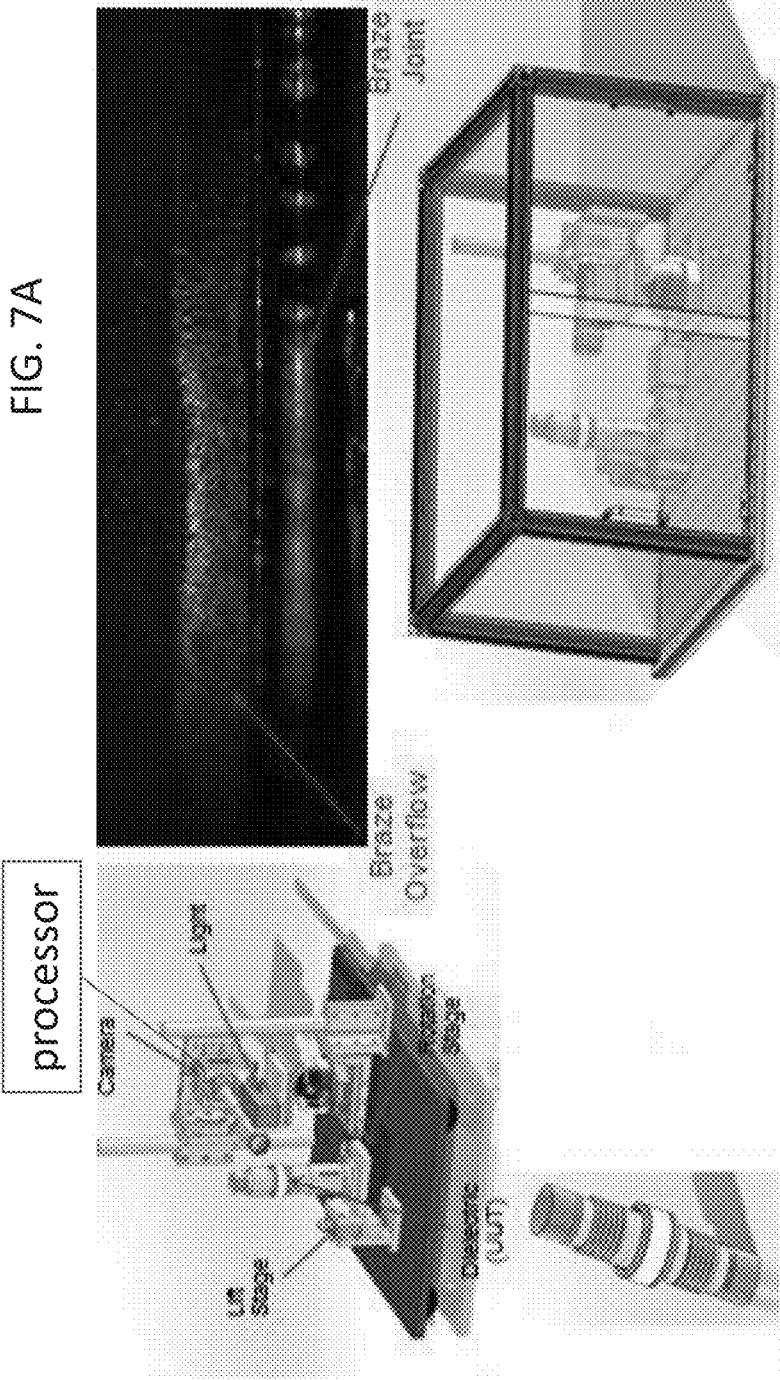
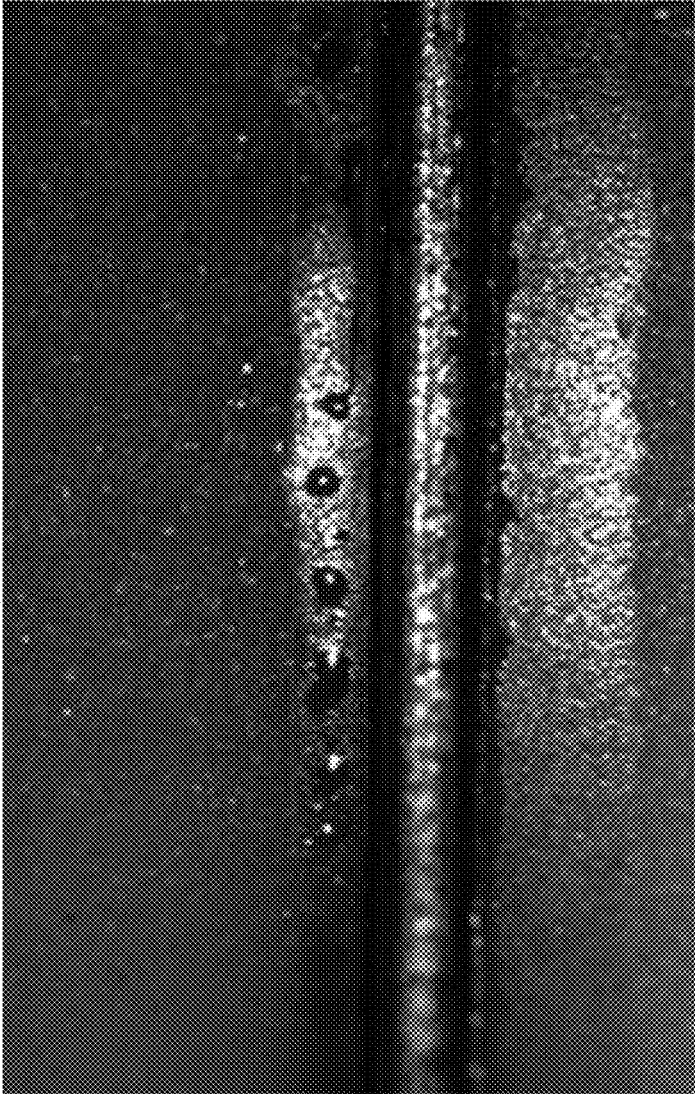


FIG. 7A

FIG. 7D

FIG. 7C

FIG. 7B



**INSPECTION METHOD FOR THE EFFECT
OF COMPOSITION ON THE BOND
STRENGTH OF A METALLIZED ALUMINA
CERAMIC**

BACKGROUND

[0001] Fuel cells are electrochemical devices which can convert energy stored in fuels to electrical energy with high efficiencies. High temperature fuel cells include solid oxide and molten carbonate fuel cells. These fuel cells may operate using hydrogen and/or hydrocarbon fuels. There are classes of fuel cells, such as the solid oxide reversible fuel cells, that also allow reversed operation, such that water or other oxidized fuel can be reduced to unoxidized fuel using electrical energy as an input.

[0002] In a high temperature fuel cell system, such as a solid oxide fuel cell (SOFC) system, an oxidizing flow is passed through the cathode side of the fuel cell while a fuel flow is passed through the anode side of the fuel cell. The oxidizing flow is typically air, while the fuel flow is typically a hydrogen-rich gas created by reforming a hydrocarbon fuel source. The fuel cell, operating at a typical temperature between 750° C. and 950° C., enables the transport of negatively charged oxygen ions from the cathode flow stream to the anode flow stream, where the ion combines with either free hydrogen or hydrogen in a hydrocarbon molecule to form water vapor and/or with carbon monoxide to form carbon dioxide. The excess electrons from the negatively charged ion are routed back to the cathode side of the fuel cell through an electrical circuit completed between anode and cathode, resulting in an electrical current flow through the circuit.

[0003] Fuel cell stacks may be either internally or externally manifolded for fuel and air. In internally manifolded stacks, the fuel and air is distributed to each cell using risers contained within the stack. In other words, the gas flows through openings or holes in the supporting layer of each fuel cell, such as the electrolyte layer, and gas separator of each cell. In externally manifolded stacks, the stack is open on the fuel and air inlet and outlet sides, and the fuel and air are introduced and collected independently of the stack hardware. For example, the inlet and outlet fuel and air flow in separate conduits between the stack and the manifold housing in which the stack is located.

[0004] Fuel cell stacks are frequently built from a multiplicity of cells in the form of planar elements, tubes, or other geometries. Fuel and air has to be provided to the electrochemically active surface, which can be large. One component of a fuel cell stack is the so called gas flow separator (referred to as a gas flow separator plate in a planar stack) that separates the individual cells in the stack. The gas flow separator plate separates fuel, such as hydrogen or a hydrocarbon fuel, flowing to the fuel electrode (i.e., anode) of one cell in the stack from oxidant, such as air, flowing to the air electrode (i.e., cathode) of an adjacent cell in the stack. Frequently, the gas flow separator plate is also used as an interconnect which electrically connects the fuel electrode of one cell to the air electrode of the adjacent cell. In this case, the gas flow separator plate which functions as an interconnect is made of or contains an electrically conductive material.

SUMMARY

[0005] The various embodiments provide a method of inspecting a unit under test containing brazed dielectric to

metal bond, comprising providing at least one image of the bond and determining a characteristic of the bond based on at least one of a presence and size of a glassy phase in or adjacent to the bond.

[0006] In an embodiment, the dielectric comprises an alumina ceramic and the glassy phase comprises a glassy alumina phase which is more shiny than adjacent ceramic alumina.

[0007] In an embodiment, the method further comprises illuminating the bond with light and using a camera to take one or more images of the bond.

[0008] In an embodiment, the method further comprises determining a value corresponding to the size of the glass phase, comparing the value to a value stored in memory, and determining whether the bond has a sufficient bond strength based on the step of comparing.

[0009] The various embodiments also provide an inspection system comprising a support, a light source, a camera and a processor configured determine a characteristic of a brazed dielectric to metal bond in a unit under test, based on at least one of a presence and size of a glassy phase in or adjacent to the bond in at least one image of the bond received from the camera.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0010] The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated herein and constitute part of this specification, illustrate example embodiments of the invention, and together with the general description given above and the detailed description given below, serve to explain the features of the invention.

[0011] FIG. 1 illustrates a side cross-sectional view of a SOFC stack.

[0012] FIG. 2 illustrates a three dimensional cut-away view of a prior art fuel cell assembly.

[0013] FIG. 3A is an exploded view of an embodiment dielectric conduit assembly. FIG. 3B is an assembled view of the assembly in FIG. 3A.

[0014] FIG. 4A is a side cross-sectional view of an embodiment dielectric conduit assembly in which the metal tubes are coupled with metal bellows. FIG. 4B is a close up of the assembly.

[0015] FIG. 5A is a side cross-sectional view of an embodiment dielectric conduit assembly in which the metal tubes are metal bellows. FIG. 5B is a close up of the assembly.

[0016] FIG. 5C is a side cross-sectional view of an alternate embodiment dielectric conduit assembly in which the metal tubes are metal bellows. FIG. 5D is a close up of the assembly.

[0017] FIG. 6 illustrates an embodiment dielectric conduit assembly in which the metal tubes are coupled with pipe tees.

[0018] FIGS. 7A and 7B are photographs of a braze joint according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0019] FIGS. 7C and 7D are schematic three dimensional perspective views of inspection systems according to embodiments of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0020] The various embodiments will be described in detail with reference to the accompanying drawings. Wherever possible, the same reference numbers will be used throughout the drawings to refer to the same or like parts. References made to particular examples and implementations are for illustrative purposes, and are not intended to limit the scope of the invention or the claims.

[0021] Various embodiments provide hermetic dielectric conduit assemblies which may be incorporated into a fuel cell system, such as into the fuel conduits of fuel cell stacks externally manifolded for air and internally manifolded for fuel. The embodiment dielectric conduit assemblies may withstand the high temperatures and thermal cycling that occurs in the hot area of the fuel cell system or inside a fuel cell system's insulated hot box (e.g., with temperatures up to 1000° C., 1250° C., or higher) without leaking or otherwise failing. For example, in some embodiments, the dielectric conduit assembly may be part of a hermetically sealed gas delivery line in a fuel cell system and may include components that compensate for changes in stress due to thermal expansion.

[0022] Various embodiment conduit assemblies may compensate for differences in coefficients of thermal expansion of various components and the uneven expansion and associated stress that may result at high temperatures in the fuel cell system. Further, embodiment conduit assemblies may withstand the cycling of expansion and contraction resulting from heating and cooling of the fuel cell system, such as cycling between temperatures from 24° C. to 1000° C.

[0023] In various embodiments, the embodiment dielectric conduit assemblies may also act to electrically isolate portions of the fuel conduits or the fuel cell stack. For example, the dielectric conduit assembly may allow the use of metallic fuel manifold plates in the stack by electrically isolating the fuel cell stack or column from the balance of the fuel delivery plumbing. The metallic manifold plates beneficially provide continuous electrical conductivity within a stack or column, thereby reducing the possibility for degradation of resistance connections, as will be described below.

[0024] FIG. 1 illustrates a solid oxide fuel cell (SOFC) stack in which each SOFC 1 comprises a cathode electrode 3 (e.g., LSM or other conductive perovskites), a solid oxide electrolyte 5 (e.g., YSZ, ScSZ, or doped ceria), and an anode electrode 7 (e.g., a cermet such as a nickel-stabilized zirconia and/or doped ceria cermet).

[0025] Various materials may be used for the cathode electrode 3, electrolyte 5, and anode electrode 7. For example, the anode electrode may comprise a cermet comprising a nickel containing phase and a ceramic phase. The nickel containing phase may consist entirely of nickel in a reduced state. This phase may form nickel oxide when it is in an oxidized state. Thus, the anode electrode is preferably annealed in a reducing atmosphere prior to operation to reduce the nickel oxide to nickel. The nickel containing phase may include other metals in addition to nickel and/or nickel alloys. The ceramic phase may comprise a stabilized zirconia, such as yttria and/or scandia stabilized zirconia and/or a doped ceria, such as gadolinia, yttria and/or samaria doped ceria.

[0026] The electrolyte may comprise a stabilized zirconia, such as scandia stabilized zirconia (SSZ) or yttria stabilized zirconia (YSZ). Alternatively, the electrolyte may comprise another ionically conductive material, such as a doped ceria.

[0027] The cathode electrode may comprise an electrically conductive material, such as an electrically conductive perovskite material, such as lanthanum strontium manganite (LSM). Other conductive perovskites, such as LSCo, etc., or metals, such as Pt, may also be used. The cathode electrode may also contain a ceramic phase similar to the anode electrode. The electrodes and the electrolyte may each comprise one or more sublayers of one or more of the above described materials.

[0028] Fuel cell stacks are frequently built from a multiplicity of SOFC's 1 in the form of planar elements, tubes, or other geometries. Although the fuel cell stack in FIG. 1 is vertically oriented, fuel cell stacks may be oriented horizontally or in any other direction. Fuel and air may be provided to the electrochemically active surface, which can be large.

[0029] The gas flow separator 9 (referred to as a gas flow separator plate when part of a planar stack), containing gas flow passages or channels 8 between ribs 10, separates the individual cells in the stack. The gas flow separator plate separates fuel, such as a hydrocarbon fuel, flowing to the fuel electrode (i.e. anode 7) of one cell in the stack from oxidant, such as air, flowing to the air electrode (i.e. cathode 3) of an adjacent cell in the stack. At either end of the stack, there may be an air end plate or fuel end plate (not shown) for providing air or fuel, respectively, to the end electrode.

[0030] Frequently, the gas flow separator plate 9 is also used as an interconnect which electrically connects the anode or fuel electrode 7 of one cell to the cathode or air electrode 3 of the adjacent cell. In this case, the gas flow separator plate which functions as an interconnect is made of or contains electrically conductive material. FIG. 1 shows that the lower SOFC 1 is located between two interconnects 9.

[0031] Interconnects may be made of or may contain electrically conductive material, such as a metal alloy (e.g., chromium-iron alloy) or an electrically conductive ceramic material, which optionally has a similar coefficient of thermal expansion to that of the solid oxide electrolyte in the cells (e.g., a difference of 0-10%). An electrically conductive contact layer, such as a nickel contact layer, may be provided between the anode electrode and the interconnect. Another optional electrically conductive contact layer may be provided between the cathode electrode and the interconnect.

[0032] The plurality of fuel cells in a fuel cell stack may share a common fuel inlet and exhaust passages or risers. A fuel cell stack may include a distinct electrical entity which contains two end plates on opposite ends of the stack which are connected to power conditioning equipment and the power (i.e., electricity) output of the stack. Thus, in some configurations, the electrical power output from such a distinct electrical entity may be controlled separately from other stacks. In other embodiments, multiple stacks may share the same end plates. In this case, the stacks may jointly comprise a distinct electrical entity (e.g., a column of stacks).

[0033] A fuel cell stack may be part of a larger fuel cell system for generating power. The fuel cell stack may be located in a hot zone within such a system. During normal operation, this hot zone may operate at a high temperature, such as a temperature of about 600° C. or more, e.g., 600-1000° C., such as 750-950° C.

[0034] FIG. 2 illustrates an example of a prior art fuel cell system, such as described in U.S. application Ser. No. 12/458, 171 filed on Jul. 2, 2009 and incorporated by reference in its entirety, in which the solid oxide fuel cell (SOFC) stacks 14 are located on a base. Each stack 14 may comprise a collection of fuel cells 1 and interconnects 9. Wedge shaped ceramic side baffles 220 (e.g., having a non-uniform thickness and a roughly triangular cross sectional shape in the horizontal direction) are located between adjacent fuel cell stacks 14 (or columns of fuel cell stacks). The baffles 220 serve to direct the externally manifolded cathode feed (e.g., air) into the cathode flow paths and to fill the space between adjacent stacks so that the cathode feed passes through each of the stacks 14, rather than bypassing around the longitudinal sides of the stacks 14.

The baffles **220** are held in place by tie rods **222** that pass through closely fitting bores **224** centrally located in each of the baffles **220**. Preferably, the baffles **220** are electrically non-conductive and made as one unitary piece from a suitable ceramic material. FIG. 2 also shows fuel distribution manifolds **204** between the stacks in the stack column and fuel inlet and exhaust conduits **92**, **94** connected to the manifolds. The fuel distribution manifolds **204** comprise a box made of metal plates and fuel delivery space inside the box.

[0035] In this prior art system, the SOFC stacks maintain a compressive load. The compressive load is maintained by upper pressure plate **230**, tie rods **222**, lower pressure plate **90** and a compression spring assembly located below the lower pressure plate **90**. The compression spring assembly applies a load directly to the lower pressure plate **90** and to the upper pressure plate **230** via the tie rods **222**.

[0036] In an alternative embodiment, the load is transmitted through the base **239** as this is the only zero datum of the system. Penetrations or feed-throughs through the base **239** are used in order to pull the required load from the base **239**.

[0037] FIG. 3A illustrates an exploded view of an embodiment dielectric conduit assembly **300** which may comprise a part of conduits **92**, **94**. The assembly **300** may include a dielectric tube **302**. The dielectric tube **302** may be made from a ceramic material with dielectric properties such that it is electrically insulating under operating conditions (e.g., 600-1200° C.). For example, the dielectric tube **302** may comprise alumina or other ceramic materials possessing high dielectric strength at operating temperatures of the fuel cell system. In various embodiments, the dielectric tube **302** may comprise high purity alumina, such as greater than 90% alumina (e.g., 94%-99.8% alumina, such as 97%-99.8% alumina). In alternate embodiments, the dielectric tube **302** may comprise silicon nitride, silicon oxynitride, or silicon aluminum oxynitride (SiAlON) based ceramics or zirconia toughened alumina ("ZTA").

[0038] The dielectric tube **302** may be coupled with a metal tube **306** at both ends. Each metal tube **306** may have a "top hat" shape with a flange or lip **316** on the end coupled with the dielectric **302**.

[0039] In various embodiments, each metal tube **306** may be made of metal alloys that can withstand the operating temperatures of the fuel cell system and have minimal reactivity with gas flowing through the gas delivery device. For example, the metal tubes **306** may comprise stainless steels such as SS 446 (e.g., by weight 23-30% Cr, <1.5% Mn, <0.75% Si, <0.5% Ni, 0.1-0.25% N, <0.12% C, <0.04% P, <0.03% S, balance Fe), 321 stainless (e.g., <0.08% C, 17-19% Cr, 9-12% Ni, <2% Mn, <1% Si, 0.3-0.7% Ti, <0.045% P, <0.03% S, balance Fe), or A286 steels (e.g., 24-27% Ni, 13-16% Cr, 1.9-2.35% Ti, <2% Mn, 1-1.5% Mo, <1% Co, 0.1-0.5% V, <0.35% Al, 0.003-0.01% B, <1% Si, <0.08% C, <0.025% P, <0.025% S, balance Fe), or high temperature alloys, such as Ni—Cr, Ni—Cr—W, Ni—Cr—Mo, Fe—Ni, Ni—Co, Fe—Co, or Fe—Ni—Co alloys. For example, exemplary alloys include Inconel® 600 series alloys, such as 600 (14-17% Cr, 6-10% Fe, 1-1.7% Al, <1% Mn, <0.5% Cu, <0.5% Si, <0.1% C, <0.015 S, balance Ni), 601 (21-25% Cr, 58-63% Ni, <1% Mn, <1% Cu, <0.5% Si, <0.15% C, <0.015 S, balance Fe), 625 (20-23% Cr, <5% Fe, 8-10% Mo, 3.15-4.15 Nb, <0.015 P, <0.4% Al, <0.5% Mn, <0.4% Ti, <0.5% Si, <0.1% C, <0.015 S, balance Ni), or 625 LCF (20-23% Cr, <5% Fe, 8-10% Mo, 3.15-4.15 Nb, <0.015 P, <0.4% Al, <0.5% Mn, <0.4% Ti, <0.15% Si, <0.03% C,

<0.015 S, <1% Co, <0.02% N, balance Ni) alloys; or Haynes® 200, 500, or 600 series alloys, such as 230 (e.g., by weight, 22% Cr, 14% W, 0.5% Mn, 2% Mo, <5% Co, 0.1% C, 0.3% Al, <0.015% B, 0.4% Si, 0.02% La, <3% Fe, balance Ni), 556 (e.g., by weight, 22% Cr, 2.5% W, 1% Mn, 3% Mo, 18% Co, 0.1% C, 0.2% Al, 0.6% Ta, 0.4% Si, 0.02% La, 0.02% Zr, 0.2% N, 20% Ni, balance Fe), or 617 (e.g., by weight, 22% Cr, 0.3% Ti, 9% Mo, 12.5% Co, 0.07% C, 1.2% Al, 1% Fe, balance Ni) alloys.

[0040] The dielectric assembly **300** may further comprise a dielectric ring **304** coupled with the lip **316** of each metal tube **304**. The dielectric rings **304** may comprise a ceramic material similar to the material of the dielectric tube **302**. In various embodiments, the dielectric rings **304** and dielectric tube **302** may be matched to have the same or similar coefficient of thermal expansion ("CTE"). For example, the dielectric rings **304** and dielectric tube **302** may comprise the same material. Alternately, the dielectric rings **304** and dielectric tube **302** may comprise different materials, but still have a closely matched coefficient of thermal expansion. In various embodiments, there may be a variability of 10⁻² or less (e.g., a window of 10⁻⁶ to 10⁻⁸) in the CTE values of the dielectric rings **304** and dielectric tube **302**.

[0041] In alternate embodiments, the dielectric rings **304** and dielectric tube **302** may be deliberately mismatched to have different CTE values. In the dielectric assembly **300**, the dielectric rings **304** may hold stress as components expand. More or less stress may be directed to the dielectric rings **304** depending on how the dielectric rings **304**, dielectric tube **302**, or other components are matched or mismatched.

[0042] The dielectric rings **304**, dielectric tube **302**, and metal tubes **306** may be coupled together by brazing with high temperature braze alloys **308**. Braze alloys **308** may comprise nickel based alloys such as Bni-2 (e.g., 82.4% Ni, 7% Cr, 3% Fe, 3.1% B, 4.5% Si), Bni-4 (e.g., 93.2% Ni, 1.5% Fe, 1.8% B, 3.5% Si), Bni-5 (e.g., 70.9% Ni, 19% Cr, 10.1% Si), Bni-8 (e.g., 65.5% Ni, 23% Mn, 4.5% Cu, 7% Si), and Bni-9 (e.g., 81.4% Ni, 15% Cr, 3.6% B) as specified by AWS. For example, braze alloys **308** may be between the lip **316** of each metal tube **306** and the dielectric tube **302**. Braze alloys **308** may also be between the lip **316** and the dielectric rings **304**. In alternate embodiments, the joints between the dielectric rings **304**, dielectric tube **302**, and metal tubes **306** may be connected by welding.

[0043] FIG. 3B illustrates an assembled dielectric assembly **300**. The lip **316** of each metal tube **306** may be coupled with opposite ends of the dielectric tube **302**, such as with a braze alloy (not shown). Each dielectric ring **304** may go around one of the metal tubes **306**. Each dielectric ring **304** may be coupled with the lip **316** of the metal tube **306** such that one side of each lip **316** is coupled with the dielectric tube **302** and the other side of each lip **316** is coupled with a dielectric ring **304**. Each dielectric ring **304** may go over metal tube **306** and contact a back side of the lip **316** such that the lip **316** separates the dielectric rings **304** and the dielectric tube **302** and prevents the rings **304** and tube **302** from contacting one another. In alternate embodiments, the dielectric rings **304** may be inside the metal tubes **306** rather than outside the metal tubes **306**, such as if the flange or lip **316** extended inward from the circumference of the metal tube **304** as shown for example in FIG. 5A.

[0044] In various embodiments, the metal tubes **306** may be coupled with other fuel cell system parts, such as by using metallic joints formed by brazing, welding, or mechanical

seals. For example, the metal tubes **306** may be coupled with gas delivery plumbing, a fuel cell stack or column (such as fuel inlets of one or more fuel manifold plates **204** of the stack), and/or a fuel cell hot box. Various embodiment assemblies may be part of the fuel inlet and exhaust conduits **92, 94** connected to the fuel distribution manifolds **204** between the fuel cell stacks **14** (see FIG. 2 for location).

[0045] FIG. 4 illustrates an embodiment assembly **400** with the metal tubes **306** coupled to bellows **402** with a joint **404** such as a brazed or welded joint. The bellows **402** may act to compensate for differences in coefficients of thermal expansion between fuel cell components. For example, the bellows **402** may act to minimize stresses exerted upon the fuel cell stack or column components, such as fuel manifold plates, such as the plates described in U.S. application Ser. No. 11/276,717 filed on Mar. 10, 2006, which is incorporated by reference in its entirety.

[0046] In various embodiments, the bellows **402** may minimize stresses exerted upon the fuel cell stack or column by deforming in the axial and/or radial directions in preference to other components of the gas delivery conduits **92, 94** and other fuel cell components. In this way, the bellows **402** may absorb stress rather than transmit stress to other components, such as ceramic components which can crack and break under excessive stress.

[0047] In various embodiments, the metal tubes **306** and the bellows **402** may be matched to have the same or similar CTE. For example, the metal tubes **306** and the bellows **402** may comprise the same material or different materials that are closely matched coefficient of thermal expansion.

[0048] In alternate embodiments, the metal tubes **306** may include or be made entirely of bellows themselves rather than coupled with bellows **402**, such that the bellows **402** may be directly coupled with the dielectric tube **302**. As illustrated in FIGS. 5A and 5B, an embodiment assembly **500** may include bellows **402** with a flange or lip **502** which extends inward from the circumference of the bellows **402**. One side of the lip **502** may be coupled with the dielectric tube **302**, such as by brazing or welding. Dielectric rings **304** may be coupled with the other side of the lip **502**, such as with the dielectric rings **304** located inside of the hollow inner space in the bellows **402** as shown in FIG. 5A.

[0049] In alternate embodiments, the bellows **402** may have a flange or lip **522** extending outward. FIGS. 5C and 5D illustrate an embodiment assembly **520** with bellows **402** having a lip **522** extending outward. The lip **520** of the bellows **402** may be coupled, such as by brazing or welding, to the dielectric tube **302** and the dielectric rings **304**, such as with the dielectric rings **304** located outside of the bellow **402** (i.e., surrounding the bellow's outer circumference) similar to the assembly with metal tubes **306** in FIG. 3B.

[0050] Although the previous embodiments have illustrated symmetric assemblies with similar structures on both ends of the dielectric tube **302**, further embodiment assemblies may connect different structures, such as different components or similar components oriented different ways. For example, as illustrated in FIG. 6, an embodiment assembly **600** may include a first pipe tee **602** connected to one metal tube **306** and a second pipe tee **604** connected to the other metal tube **306**. The first pipe tee **602** and second pipe tee **604** may be oriented in different directions. For example, the first pipe tee **602** may deliver fuel in (or fuel out) from the fuel conduits **92, 94** and the second pipe tee **604** may deliver fuel in (or fuel out) to a manifold plate in the fuel cell stack.

[0051] In alternate embodiments, pipe tees or other components may be directly coupled with the dielectric tube **302** and dielectric rings **304** similar to how the bellows were coupled with the dielectric tube **302** and dielectric rings **304** in FIGS. 5A and 5C.

[0052] In another embodiment, the present inventors realized that during inspection of a metal to dielectric (e.g., ceramic) brazed bond (i.e., a joint between metal and ceramic), that a presence of a glassy phase in or adjacent to the brazed bond is indicative of a high bond strength. Specifically, the glassy phase (e.g., an amorphous phase) appears shiny when a light is shined on the bond area. In contrast, the ceramic (e.g., crystalline) phase of the ceramic material adjacent to or in the bond area appears matte when light is shined on the bond area.

[0053] Without wishing to be bound by a particular theory, the present inventors believe that the presence of the shiny glassy phase, which is believed to be an alumina glassy (e.g., amorphous rather than crystalline) phase, in the bond and/or in the dielectric part region adjacent to the bond correlates with the composition of the alumina dielectric which is conducive of a high strength brazed bond to a metal, such as an alumina composition containing the desired amount of added SiO₂, CaO, and/or MgO.

[0054] In one embodiment, a metal or metal alloy film, such as a molybdenum-manganese alloy film is applied and sintered to the alumina dielectric prior to brazing. This is done to allow for a metal component to be subsequently brazed to the alumina. In other words, the metal component may be brazed to the metal alloy film that is already sintered to the alumina surface.

[0055] Without wishing to be bound by a particular theory, the present inventors believe that to have a proper molybdenum-manganese metalized surface, the oxidation of the manganese and its reaction with the glassy phase of the alumina are important factors leading to the high bond strength and that the presence of the glassy phase within the alumina positively affects the bond strength of the final metallized ceramic.

[0056] The brazed bond may be located between any suitable dielectric component, such as the dielectric tube **302** or dielectric ring **304**, and any suitable metal component, such as the metal tube **306**, which are parts of the dielectric conduit assembly **300** described above.

[0057] However, any other brazed dielectric (e.g., ceramic, such as alumina) to metal parts may be inspected according to the present embodiment.

[0058] FIGS. 7A and 7B are photographs of a brazed joint between alumina dielectric parts containing the molybdenum-manganese metalized surface and the metal part. The glassy phase of the alumina is visible as the shiny surface in specific areas of the brazed metal-ceramic assembly, as shown in FIGS. 7A and 7B. For example, FIG. 7B illustrates the contrast between the shiny glassy phase and the matte (i.e., less shiny) bulk ceramic phase.

[0059] Any suitable inspection method and system may be used to inspect the brazed bond for the presence of the shiny, glassy phase.

[0060] For example, a manual system shown in FIG. 7C may be used. The manual system includes a support, such as a sample stage (e.g., movable lift stage or stationary stage), a video camera (e.g., a camera which takes photographs or a continuous moving image), and a light source (e.g., a light

source which emits light having peak wavelength in the red color wavelength range, such as a red light emitting LED).

[0061] Alternatively, an automated or semi-automated system shown in FIG. 7D may be used. In this system, the sample stage is replaced by a moving support, such as a rotating carousel or a linear conveyor which moves plural units under test ("UUT") past the light source and the camera in a batch or continuous mode.

[0062] In the method of using the systems shown in FIGS. 7C and 7D, the UUT (e.g., the assembly 300 described above) is placed on the support, and provided adjacent to the camera and the light source. The light (e.g., red light) from the light source is shined on the surface of the brazed bond of the UUT, and the camera takes one or more still or moving images of the brazed bond. The light reflects off the two different surfaces (e.g., shiny glassy surface vs. matte ceramic surface) differently and the one or more images of the reflected light are then captured by the high resolution camera.

[0063] A processor, such as a dedicated processor chip or a general purpose computer, coupled to a memory, where the processor can be configured with processor-executable instructions for performing various functions, is connected to the camera via a wired or wireless connection. The processor receives the one or more images captured by the camera. The processor determines the presence and the size (e.g., width and/or height) of the glassy phase. The determined presence and size of the glassy phase is then translated into a value that is compared to a look up table or another reference stored in a memory associated with the processor.

[0064] If the determined presence and size of the glassy phase matches the stored value of a bond having a sufficient strength or is above a certain stored threshold value of a bond having a sufficient strength, then the UUT is qualified as acceptable. If the determined presence and size of the glassy phase does not match the stored value of a bond having the sufficient strength or is below the stored threshold value of the bond having a sufficient strength, then the UUT is rejected as unacceptable and/or is provided for additional inspection (e.g., visual inspection by the operator, mechanical bond strength testing, etc.). If plural images are captured by the camera, then the glass phase size value is summed from all the images of the different regions of the UUT (e.g., 2 to 200, such as 72-96 images per braze joint), and the summed value is compared to summed value(s) stored in memory.

[0065] The preceding description of the disclosed aspects is provided to enable any person skilled in the art to make or use the present invention. Various modifications to these aspects will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art, and the generic principles defined herein may be applied to other aspects without departing from the scope of the invention. Thus, the present invention is not intended to be limited to the aspects shown herein but is to be accorded the widest scope consistent with the principles and novel features disclosed herein.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of inspecting a unit under test containing brazed dielectric to metal bond, comprising:
 - providing at least one image of the bond; and
 - determining a characteristic of the bond based on at least one of a presence and size of a glassy phase in or adjacent to the bond.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the dielectric comprises an alumina ceramic and the glassy phase comprises a glassy alumina phase which is more shiny than adjacent ceramic alumina.
3. The method of claim 2, further comprising illuminating the bond with light and using a camera to take one or more images of the bond.
4. The method of claim 3, further comprising determining a value corresponding to the size of the glass phase, comparing the value to a value stored in memory, and determining whether the bond has a sufficient bond strength based on the step of comparing.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein the unit under test comprises a conduit assembly for a fuel cell system, comprising:
 - a dielectric tube comprising a first end and a second end;
 - a first metal tube comprising a first lip coupled to the first end of the dielectric tube by the brazed bond;
 - a first dielectric ring coupled to the first lip of the first metal tube;
 - a second metal tube comprising a second lip coupled to the second end of the dielectric tube; and
 - a second dielectric ring coupled to the second lip of the second metal tube by a second brazed bond.
6. The method of claim 5, wherein the dielectric tube and the first and second dielectric ring each comprise an alumina ceramic, and the first and second metal tubes comprise stainless steel or a nickel chromium alloy.
7. The method of claim 2, wherein the brazed bond is located between a manganese molybdenum alloy sintered to the alumina ceramic surface and a metal part.
8. An inspection system comprising a support, a light source, a camera and a processor configured determine a characteristic of a brazed dielectric to metal bond in a unit under test, based on at least one of a presence and size of a glassy phase in or adjacent to the bond in at least one image of the bond received from the camera.
9. An inspection system comprising a support, a light source, a camera and a means for determining a characteristic of a brazed dielectric to metal bond in a unit under test based on at least one of a presence and size of a glassy phase in or adjacent to the bond in at least one image of the bond received from the camera.

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