

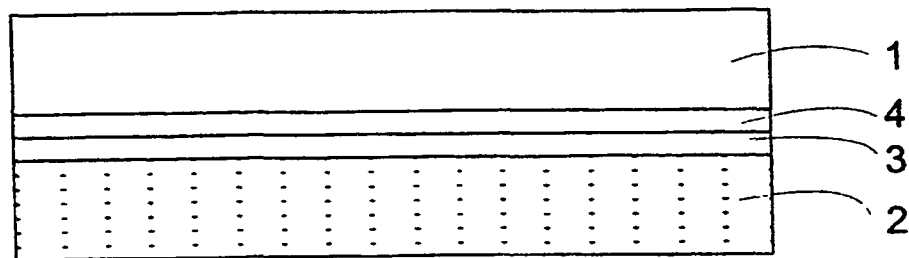
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54	METHOD FOR MAKING A JOINT BETWEEN COPPER AND STAINLESS STEEL				
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FOR ABSTRACT SEE THE NEXT SHEET



(57) Abstract: A method for making a joint between copper or copper alloys and austenitic steel alloys, in which method in between the junction surfaces of the objects to be joined together, there is arranged at least one intermediate layer, so that the junction surfaces including their intermediate layers are pressed together, and at least the junction area is heated in order to create a diffusion joint. In the method, there is brought a first intermediate layer (3) on the junction surface of the steel object (2) or against said surface, mainly in order to prevent the nickel loss from the steel object (2), and at least a second intermediate layer (4) on the junction surface of the copper object (1) or against said surface in order to activate the creation of a diffusion joint.

METHOD FOR MAKING A JOINT BETWEEN COPPER AND STAINLESS STEEL

The present invention relates to a method according to the preamble of claim 1.

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In the prior art, there are known several different methods for making joints between stainless steel and copper. When joining copper and stainless steel together, several factors must be taken into account, among them the different strengths of the materials in high temperatures, as well as their differences in thermal conductivity, thermal expansion and melting temperatures. In joining methods, such as soldering, brazing or welding, problems are caused by so-called brazing brittleness, which means the penetration of copper in a diffusion joint to the grain limits of steel, which makes the joint remarkably brittle. The US patent 4,194,672 discloses a method for joining copper and stainless steel by diffusion welding. In said method, a thin layer of nickel, nickel alloys, chromium, Ni+Cr or Cr+Ni, is used in between the junction surfaces of the pieces to be joined in order to prevent copper from being diffused to the grain limits of stainless steel and to improve adhesion. The joint is diffusion welded at a temperature of 850° - 950° C. The method requires a relatively high temperature and a long period of thermal treatment in order to create the joint. Moreover, the strength of the joint achieved by means of this method is limited. The US patent 5,664,723 introduces a brazing technique where a piece of copper is joined to metal or to a ceramic material. The joint of copper and stainless steel disclosed in said publication is made by using an extremely thin nickel layer as a diffusion barrier on the steel surface, and in addition by using a tin layer as a brazing agent on the copper surface. The pieces are brought together and heated in two steps, first up to 400° C for the duration of one hour, and after that additionally up to 800° C for the duration of 20 minutes. Thus the applied method requires a relatively long heating period in two steps.

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The object of the present invention is to realize a method for making a joint whereby the drawbacks known in the prior art solutions can be avoided.

Another object of the invention is to realize a joint that maintains good electroconductive capacities even in corrosive conditions of extensive duration. Yet another object of the invention is to realize a joint that has a good resistance in high temperatures.

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The invention is characterized by what is specified in the appended claims.

The method according to the invention is mainly characterized in that a first intermediate layer is brought onto the junction surface of the steel object or
10 against said surface, mainly in order to prevent the loss of nickel from the steel object, and at least a second intermediate layer onto the junction surface of the copper object or against said surface in order to activate the creation of a diffusion solution. According to a preferred embodiment, the first intermediate layer is chosen from the following group: nickel (Ni), chromium (Cr), a mixture or
15 alloy of nickel and chromium (Ni + Cr), a mixture of chromium and nickel (Cr + Ni). According to a preferred embodiment, the second intermediate layer mainly consists of tin (Sn).

According to a preferred embodiment of the invention, there is additionally
20 arranged at least a third intermediate layer in between the first intermediate layer and the copper object. According to a preferred embodiment of the method, there is brought at least a second intermediate layer and at least a third intermediate layer, and the melting temperature of the second intermediate layer is lower than that of the third intermediate layer. The third intermediate
25 layer may consist mainly of silver (Ag), or it can be an alloy or mixture of silver (Ag) and copper (Cu). According to a preferred embodiment of the method, the junction area is heated in one step.

The method according to the invention has several important advantages. By
30 applying a nickel layer on the steel surface when making the joint, it is possible to prevent a nickel loss that could take place from the austenitic stainless steel towards copper and could embrittle the steel. The creation of the joint is

activated by means of a brazing agent layer at the junction surface between the copper surface and the nickel-plated steel sheet. By means of the activator, lower joining temperatures can be used, so that the thermal stresses created in the junction area are smaller. By using the intermediate layers according to the
5 invention, a one-step heating of the junction can be applied in the creation of the joint. By means of the arrangement according to the invention, there are achieved joints that have a better tensile strength than the conventional diffusion joint.

10 In this application, the term copper refers to, apart from objects made of copper, also to alloy materials with a copper content that essentially includes at least 50% copper. The term stainless steel in this application refers mainly to austenitic alloy steels, such as stainless and acid-proof steels.

15 The invention is explained in more detail below, with reference to the appended drawings, where

Figure 1 illustrates the structure of a joint according to the invention prior to the heating step,

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Figure 2 illustrates the structure of another joint according to the invention prior to the heating step, and

Figure 3 illustrates the structure of a third joint according to the invention prior to
25 the heating step.

In the method according to the invention, there is made a joint between an object 1 consisting mainly of copper, and austenitic stainless steel 2, in which method there are provided several intermediate layers in between the surfaces
30 to be joined, at least one of said intermediate layers consisting of a brazing agent. The surfaces are placed against each other and pressed together, so that the brazing agent remains in between the compressed surfaces. Heat is

brought at least to the junction area, so that there is created a diffusion joint.

Figure 1 illustrates an embodiment of the joining method according to the invention shown in cross-section, prior to the thermal treatment. An object 1 essentially consisting mainly of copper, and another object 2 consisting of austenitic stainless steel, are thereby joined together. In the junction between the two objects, there are arranged intermediate layers 3, 4. The first intermediate layer 3 placed against the steel includes mainly nickel (Ni). In addition, when creating the joint there also is used a second intermediate layer 10 4, i.e. a so-called activator layer, which in the case of the example is for instance tin (Sn). Tin functions as the activator and results in a lowering of the temperature, which is required in the creation of the joint.

The first intermediate layer 3 can be formed on the stainless steel surface by means of a separate treatment. When nickel is used as the first intermediate 15 layer 3, said layer can be created on the stainless steel surface for example by means of electrolysis. Nickel-plating is typically carried out so that the passivation layer provided on the stainless steel surface does not present an obstacle to the material transfer on the junction surface between stainless steel 20 and nickel. The first intermediate layer 3 can also exist in the form of foil.

When heating the junction area, there is created a diffusion joint on the surfaces of the objects to be joined together; this takes place as a result of the nickel diffusion on one hand, and as a result of the diffusion of the copper and steel 25 components on the other. The creation of the diffusion joint, and the structures created therein, are activated by means of an extremely thin second intermediate layer 4 required by the applied manufacturing conditions and the desired joint, i.e. the brazing agent layer, or by means of a mixture of several intermediate layers 4, 5 placed on the junction surface between the 30 nickel-plated steel object 2 and the copper object 1.

The employed brazing agents of the intermediate layers 4, 5 as well as the

diffusion-activating agents can be silver-copper alloys and tin in pure or specific layer structures. Mechanically strong joints are obtained within the temperature range of 600 – 800° C. The selection of thermal treatment periods can be carried out so that the creation of brittle intermetallic phases in the final joint are
5 avoided. The brazing agent thicknesses, as well as the thermal treatment temperature and duration are chosen so that the nickel loss from steel is prevented as a result of the alloy with a high nickel content provided on the surface thereof. An advantage of a low joining temperature is that the thermal stresses created in the junction area are minimal.

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Figure 2 illustrates another preferred embodiment of the joining method according to the invention prior to the thermal treatment. An object 1 essentially consisting of copper, and another object 2 consisting of austenitic stainless steel, are thereby joined together. In the junction between the two objects, there
15 are arranged several intermediate layers 3, 4, 5. The first intermediate layer 3 placed against the steel includes mainly nickel (Ni). In addition, when creating the joint there also is used a second intermediate layer 4, i.e. a so-called activator agent, which in the case of the example is tin (Sn). Tin functions as an activator when making the joint and results in a lowering of the temperature,
20 which is required in the creation of the joint. In addition to the tin layer, the junction includes, in between the tin layer 4 and the nickel layer 3, a third intermediate layer 5, which preferably consists of another brazing agent. In a preferred embodiment, it is an Ag+Cu brazing agent, advantageously in the form of foil. According to a preferred embodiment, the second brazing agent
25 layer includes, in percentages by weight, Ag 71% and Cu 29%. Advantageously the brazing agent has, with a given alloy composition, a eutectic composition with copper.

Figure 3 illustrates yet another embodiment of the method according to the
30 invention prior to heating the joint. There a second intermediate layer 4 is provided on both surfaces of the third intermediate layer 5, or against said surfaces. In this embodiment, there can typically be used a layer foil, where one

or both surfaces of the foil are treated for instance with tin.

The thicknesses of the intermediate layers used in the method vary. The thickness of the Ni layer employed as the first intermediate layer is typically 2 - 50 μm . After electrolysis, it is typically 2 -10 μm , as a foil of the order 20 - 50 μm . The thickness of the Ag or Ag+Cu foil employed as the third intermediate layer is typically 10 - 500 μm , preferably 20 - 100 μm . The thickness of the second intermediate layer 4 is typically dependent on the thickness of the third intermediate layer 5, and is for instance 10 - 50% of the thickness of the third intermediate layer. Extremely high-quality joints have been achieved by applying for instance a 5 -10 μm tin layer on the surfaces of a 50 μm thick Ag+Cu brazing agent foil. The tin layers can be formed for example by immersing the brazing agent in the form of foil in molten tin, and when necessary, by thereafter rolling the foil to be smooth.

EXAMPLE I

Acid-proof steel (AISI 316) and copper (Cu) were joined together. On the steel junction surface, there was provided, as a first intermediate layer, a nickel (Ni) layer with the thickness of 7 μm . As a diffusion activator and brazing agent, there was used an Ag+Cu brazing agent having a eutectic composition, including in percentages by weight 71% Ag and 29% Cu. The brazing agent was in the form of foil with the thickness of 50 μm , and on the foil surface there was also formed a tin (Sn) layer with a thickness of the order 5 - 10 μm . The objects to be joined together were placed against each other, so that the foil was left in between the junction surfaces. The objects were pressed together, and the junction area was heated above the melting temperature of the brazing agent, up to a temperature of about 800° C. The holding time was about 10 minutes. The junction according to the example succeeded excellently.

CLAIMS

- 5 1. A method for making a joint between copper or copper alloys and austenitic steel alloys, in which method in between the junction surfaces of the objects to be joined together, there is arranged at least one intermediate layer, so that the junction surfaces including their intermediate layers are pressed together, and at least the junction area is heated in order to create a diffusion joint,
- 10 **characterized** in that there is brought a first intermediate layer (3) on the junction surface of the steel object (2) or against said surface, mainly in order to prevent the nickel loss from the steel object (2), and at least a second intermediate layer (4) on the junction surface of the copper object (1) or against said surface in order to activate the creation of a diffusion joint.
- 15 2. A method according to claim 1, **characterized** in that the first intermediate layer (3) is chosen among the following group: nickel (Ni), chromium (Cr), a mixture or alloy of nickel and chromium (Ni+Cr), a mixture of chromium and nickel (Cr+Ni).
- 20 3. A method according to claim 1 or 2, **characterized** in that the second intermediate layer (4) consists mainly of tin (Sn).
4. A method according to any of the claims 1 - 3, **characterized** in that there is
- 25 arranged at least a third intermediate layer (5) in between the first intermediate layer (3) and the copper object (1).
5. . A method according to any of the claims 1 - 4, **characterized** in that there is brought at least a second intermediate layer (4) and at least a third intermediate
- 30 layer (5), and that the melting temperature of the second intermediate layer (4) is lower than the melting temperature of the third intermediate layer (5).

6. A method according to any of the claims 1 - 5, **characterized** in that the third intermediate layer (5) consists mainly of silver (Ag), or of silver (Ag) and copper (Cu) either as an alloy or in a mixture.

5 7. A method according to any of the claims 1 - 6, **characterized** in that the junction area is heated in one step.

8. A method according to any of the claims 1 - 7, **characterized** in that the junction area is heated up to the temperature of 600 - 850 °C.

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9. A method according to any of the claims 1 - 8, **characterized** in that the thickness of the first intermediate layer (3) is about 2 - 50 µm.

10. A method according to any of the claims 1 - 9, **characterized** in that the
15 thickness of the third intermediate layer (5) is about 10 - 500 µm.

11. A method according to any of the claims 1 - 10, **characterized** in that the second intermediate layer (4) is brought onto the surface of the third intermediate layer (5).

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12. A method according to any of the claims 1 - 11, **characterized** in that at least one of the intermediate layers (3, 4, 5) is brought to the junction area in the form of foil.

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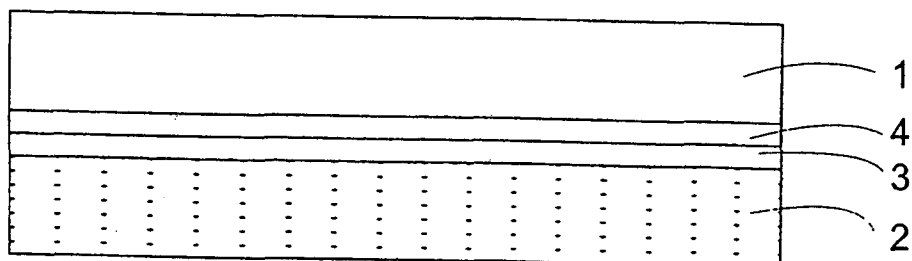


Fig. 1

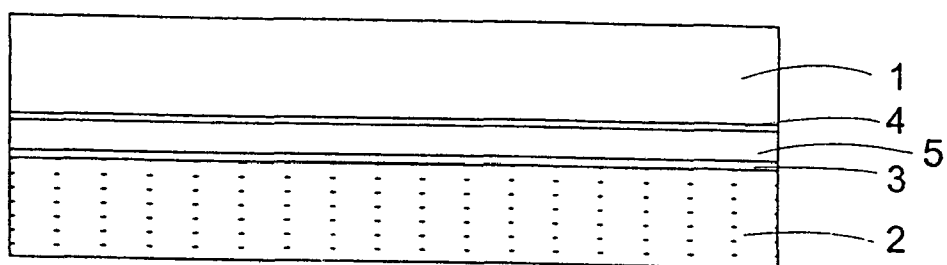


Fig. 2

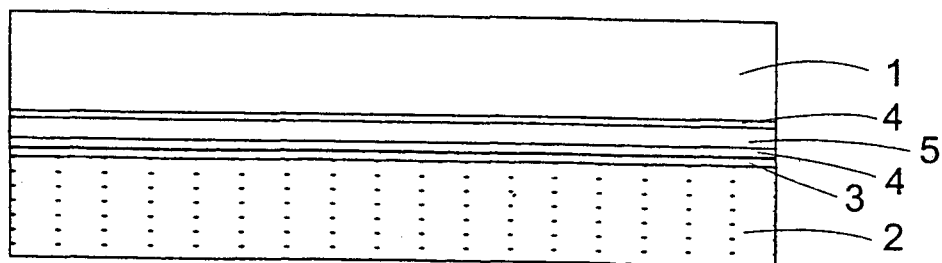


Fig. 3