

PATENT SPECIFICATION

(11) 1412998

1412998

- (21) Application No. 1055/73 (22) Filed 9 Jan. 1973
 (31) Convention Application No. 217876 (32) Filed 14 Jan. 1972 in
 (33) United States of America (US)
 (44) Complete Specification published 5 Nov. 1975
 (51) INT CL² C23C 15/00
 (52) Index at acceptance



C7F 1A 1V1 1V2 2F 2L 2M 2U 3C 4D 4E 4F 4H 4L
 6A3 6A4 6D2 6E2
 C7A A249 A279 A299 A329 A339 A34X A34Y A369 A389
 A409 A439 A459 A509 A529 A549 A579 A599
 A601 A603 A605 A607 A60X A60Y A629 A671
 A673 A675 A677 A679 A67X A681 A683 A685
 A687 A689 A68X A693 A695 A697 A699
 A69X A70X
 H1M 1B2A 1B2B3 1B2BX 1B2C10 1B2C2 1B2C4 1B2C7
 1B2CX 1G9B 1J2 1P14 1P15

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(54) NITROGEN-DOPED BETA TANTALUM

(71) We, WESTERN ELECTRIC COMPANY, INCORPORATED of 195 Broadway, New York City, New York State, United States of America, a Corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of New York, United States of America, do hereby declare the invention, for which we pray that a patent may be granted to us, and the method by which it is to be performed, to be particularly described in and by the following statement:—

The invention relates to nitrogen-doped beta tantalum.

Electronic systems, particularly those in the communications industry, are rapidly becoming larger and more complex. With the development of increasingly more complicated electronic systems, the number of circuit components and necessary interconnections has increased many times over. The failure of even one component or of one lead connection can mean the failure of an entire system and an accompanying loss of service. Accordingly, components and interconnection techniques meeting reliability requirements of small systems may not be sufficiently reliable when connected in vast quantities in large, modern electronic systems.

Extensive research effort has been directed toward producing circuits and circuit elements which are reliable and stable in use and retain these characteristics over prolonged life periods. Tantalum integrated thin-film circuitry technology has evolved in response to this need.

Utilization of the thin-film technology inherently permits a substantial reduction in individual lead connections with accompanying increases in reliability. This reduction in

individual lead connections is possible because a plurality of circuit components can frequently be formed on a single substrate from a single continuous film or from adjacent film layers inherently interconnecting the components. If the circuit components thus interconnected have the required reliability and stability, highly reliable and stable electronic systems can be built in this manner.

The stability and reliability of thin-film circuit components and therefore thin-film circuits depend to a considerable extent upon the material used to form the thin films. For this reason, there is a great need to find new materials for forming improved thin-film circuit elements. One such new material is beta tantalum which is described in British Patent Specification No. 1,141,684 and British Patent Specification No. 1,157,903.

Pure beta tantalum is an excellent material for both thin-film capacitors and resistors. It has been found however, that another new material, nitrogen-doped beta tantalum permits even further improvement in tantalum thin-film component stability and reliability. Accordingly, the invention provides a composition of matter comprising nitrogen-doped beta tantalum containing at least 0.1 atomic percent nitrogen.

Preferably the nitrogen is present in an amount of not more than 10 atomic percent. The invention also provides an electric component comprising a substrate having a film of nitrogen-doped beta tantalum containing at least 0.1 atomic percent nitrogen. Typically, the article is a thin film capacitor incorporating the nitrogen-doped beta tantalum.

The invention further provides a method of forming nitrogen-doped beta tantalum comprising sputtering tantalum in an atmos-

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phere comprising an inert gas and including a nitrogen atoms-containing gas and adjusting the concentration of the nitrogen atoms-containing gas to a value whereat the tantalum combined with the nitrogen atoms and deposits on a substrate a nitrogen-doped beta tantalum film containing from 0.1 to 10 atomic percent nitrogen.

Nitrogen doping of beta tantalum refers to combining nitrogen atoms with tantalum atoms to form a beta tantalum crystalline structure having the nitrogen atoms interstitially incorporated therewith or therein. It had been previously thought that depositing tantalum, under conditions whereby beta tantalum forms, in the presence of nitrogen atoms, present in even small quantities, i.e., nitrogen doping of the resultant tantalum deposit, caused the resultant deposited tantalum to transform from the beta tantalum crystalline phase to the body-centered cubic structure of bulk or α tantalum, with an accompanying drop in resistivity. However, it has been surprisingly found that such is not true and that nitrogen doping of beta tantalum can be carried out without changing the crystal structure of beta tantalum to body-centered cubic and without forming other tantalum-nitrogen compounds of distinct crystalline structure such as Ta_3H (hexagonal close packed) or TaN (sodium chloride structure). It has also been found that nitrogen doping of beta tantalum increases the resistivity thereof rather than decreases it.

Specific embodiments of the invention will now be described, by way of example, and with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:—

Figure 1 is a cross-sectional view of a typical AC sputtering apparatus;

Figure 2 is a graphical representation of co-ordinates of electrical resistivity in microhm-cm. against increasing nitrogen content showing the variations of resistivity at 25°C of sputtered tantalum films having a thickness of at least 1,000 angstrom units;

Figure 3 is a plan view of a thin-film capacitor fabricated according to the embodiment of the invention; and

Figure 4 is a sectional view taken along lines 4—4 of Figure 3.

By the term N-doped beta tantalum is meant a combination of tantalum atoms and nitrogen atoms forming a beta tantalum crystal structure having nitrogen atoms interstitially incorporated therewith or therein.

With reference to Figure 1, there is shown a simplified cross-sectional view of a typical AC sputtering apparatus 17 which has DC biasing provided therein and which is suitable for depositing a continuous film 18 of N-doped beta tantalum on a nonconductive substrate 15, e.g., glass, ceramic. The sputtering apparatus 17 includes a rectangular

sputtering chamber 19 formed from a conductive material, e.g., steel, which is electrically grounded, i.e., at earth potential. Extending through the chamber 19 is a target array 21 comprising a planar array of elongated, mutually parallel cylindrical tantalum elements 22 and 22' extending horizontally in the chamber 19. The elements 22 and 22' comprise high purity tantalum and are electrically insulated from the sputtering chamber 19. The elements 22 and 22' extend completely through the chamber 19 and penetrate opposed vertical walls thereof through standard sealing means, e.g., vacuum gaskets and seals and ceramic insulators.

The plane of the array of elements 22 and 22' is parallel to and transversely spaced from the plane of the substrate 15 which is disposed and supported within the chamber 19, at a predetermined distance from the array of elements 22 and 22', typically about 2-1/2 inches, by means of a conventional substrate carrier 23. The substrate carrier 23 is in turn supported by a pair of identical metallic, channel-shaped tracks 24 (only one of which is shown) which are mounted above the array 21 and which extend longitudinally through the sputtering chamber 19. The tracks 24 are fixedly supported within the sputtering chamber 19 by conventional means known in the art. The tracks 24 are for movably supporting the substrate carrier 23 within the sputtering chamber 19. The substrate carrier 23 may be longitudinally advanced from an auxiliary chamber 26 which abuts the sputtering chamber 19 and is movably affixed thereto. Chamber 26 communicates with chamber 19 through a conduit 27 which mates with a conduit 28 of the sputtering chamber 19. Faces 29 and 31 of chambers 19 and 26, respectively, are vacuum sealing and the surfaces defining conduits 27 and 28 are maintained vacuum sealed by conventional means (not shown), e.g., by the use of o-ring seals.

The substrate carrier 23 is advanced by means of a push rod 32, to which the carrier 23 is affixed, which can extend completely through the auxiliary chamber 26 into the sputtering chamber 19 when conduits 27 and 28 are aligned or mated. The auxiliary chamber 26 also has a pair of identical metallic channel-shaped tracks 33 (only one of which is shown) which mate with tracks 24 when the conduits 27 and 28 are aligned. These tracks 33 are for movably supporting the substrate carrier 23 when it is contained in the auxiliary chamber 26.

The auxiliary chamber 26 is intended for loading and unloading the substrate 15, as a holding chamber during pre-sputtering and as a heating chamber for the substrate 15. The auxiliary chamber 26 is movably mounted on guide rails 34 which are affixed to the sputtering chamber 19 whereby the auxiliary

chamber 26 can be moved in an upper position (not illustrated) prior to loading of the sputtering chamber 19, and locked thereat by conventional means (not shown), e.g., a clamp. When loading of the sputtering chamber 19 is to take place, the auxiliary chamber 26 is moved to a lower position (as illustrated), and locked thereat by conventional means (not shown), e.g., a clamp. A heating means (not shown) for heating the substrate 15 is provided in the auxiliary chamber 26.

Each of the elements 22 and 22' is uniformly spaced from one another and is tubular in shape with a uniform diameter. Each of the elements 22 and 22' includes a central bore 37 through which a suitable coolant (not shown) may be passed during a sputtering operation, to which the substrate 15 is destined to be subjected. The coolant is provided to prevent excessive heating and/or melting of the tantalum elements 22 and 22'. Elements 22 are electrically connected in common by a conventional conductive means 40 which extends through an electrically insulative vacuum-tight support 38, through a switch 39, to one terminal of a conventional high voltage AC source 41 that is electrically isolated from the walls of the chamber 19. Elements 22' are electrically connected in common to the other terminal of the AC source by conventional conductive means 42 which extends into chamber 19 through an electrically insulative vacuum-tight support 43. Thus, essentially all of the source potential may be applied across adjacent elements 22 and 22' in the array 21 to provide an intensive oscillating electric field between the adjacent elements 22 and 22'. During the half cycle of the applied AC voltage when the elements 22 are negative with respect to the remainder of the elements 22', the elements 22 constitute a cathodic source of tantalum, i.e., a tantalum cathode of the sputtering apparatus. Similarly, when the tantalum elements 22' are negative with respect to elements 22, the elements 22' constitute the cathode. In this way, each of the elements 22 and 22' constitutes a cathode source of the sputtering apparatus 17. A separate anode of the type generally employed to support the substrate 15 in conventional diode sputtering apparatus is therefore not required.

In order to increase deposition rates and thus speed of processing, an auxiliary conductive bias member 44 is provided within the chamber 19 adjacent to the plane of the array 21. The member 44 is supported in parallel and electrical coupling relation to the array 21 by means of a dielectric bracket 47 affixed to the base 48 of the chamber 19. A conventional conductive means 49 extends upwardly from an electrically insulating vacuum-tight support 51 through the

base 48 and is affixed to the plate 47. The conductive means 49 is affixed to an adjustable, grounded DC bias source 52. The member 44 is thus biased with a steady potential of selectable polarity from the bias source 52.

For any given pressure in the chamber 19, the use of the biased member 44 in conjunction with the AC-connected array 21 increases the cathode current density during the sputtering operation, to which the substrate 15 is destined to be subjected, in direct proportion to the voltage of the bias supply source 52 up to bias voltages of several hundred volts.

Reactive sputtering, as compared to non-reactive sputtering, takes place within a reactive atmosphere which may comprise a gas such as nitrogen-containing gas, e.g., N_2 , NH_3 , etc. A gas inlet means 53 passes through a cover plate 54 of the auxiliary chamber 26 and communicates with the interior of the chamber 26. The gas inlet 53 is provided to introduce a non-reactive sputtering gas, e.g., argon, helium, neon, krypton, etc., from a gas source 56, into chamber 26 and ultimately into chamber 19, to condition the apparatus 17 for the sputtering operation. The gas inlet 53 is also provided to introduce the reactive nitrogen-containing gas, e.g., N_2 , NH_3 , etc., which is directed from a source 57 into inlet 53 and combines therein with the non-reactive gas, e.g., Ar, He, Ne, Kr, etc., to form a sputtering gas mixture. The gases of the gas mixture (inert and reactive) normally comprise a majority of electrically neutral gas molecules but during a sputtering operation, a portion of these molecules are ionized to produce positive ions and electrons, i.e., a plasma. A standard evacuation source 58, e.g., vacuum pump, passes through the cover plate 59 of chamber 19 and communicates with the interior of the chamber 19. The evacuation source 58 is provided to evacuate chambers 19 and 26 initially, during an inert gas flushing operation, during introduction of the sputtering gas mixture, and throughout the sputtering operation.

In operation, the top plate 54 of the auxiliary chamber 26 is removed and the substrate 15 is placed on the carrier 23 which is initially maintained in the auxiliary chamber 26. The top plate 54 is replaced and the auxiliary chamber 26 and the sputtering chamber 19 are then evacuated by means of the vacuum source 58, typically to approximately 2×10^{-6} torr. Chambers 19 and 26 are then flushed with an inert gas, as for example, any of the members of the rare gas family such as helium, argon, or neon, from source 56 through inlet 53. The chambers 19 and 26 are then re-evacuated, i.e., a low-pressure ambient is maintained therein. The substrate 15 is then heated in the auxiliary

chamber 26 by conventional means (not shown) to a suitable initial temperature, typically 400°C for a pre-sputtering period of time ranging from 15 to 45 minutes whereafter the substrate 15 is cooled to a suitable sputtering temperature, typically 200°C. The substrate 15 is then moved into the sputtering chamber 19 by means of the push rod 32 which moves the carrier 23 and substrate 15 along tracks 33 through the conduit 27, through the conduit 28 on tracks 24 and into the deposition chamber 19. The reactive nitrogen-containing gas, e.g., N_2 , is conducted from source 57 at a predetermined flow rate, e.g., 0.6 cc/min; and combined with the inert gas, e.g., argon, which is conducted from source 56 at a predetermined flow rate, e.g., 25 cc/min., to form a reactive gas mixture, e.g., a gas mixture comprising 2.3 percent by volume N_2 , remainder argon, and introducing into chambers 26 and 19 at a predetermined flow rate, e.g., 25 cc/min., through inlet 53, to raise the pressure to a predetermined value, e.g., typically 30×10^{-3} torr.

After the requisite pressure is obtained, e.g., 30×10^{-3} torr., the switch 39 in series with the AC source 41 is closed to apply the high AC voltage of the source 41 between adjacent elements 22 and 22'. The resulting electric field, e.g., 5,000 volts AC (RMS) between the adjacent elements 22 and 22' ionizes the introduced gases (inert and reactive) to create a current, e.g., 500 ma at a voltage of 5,000 volts and a pressure of 30×10^{-3} torr., so that positive ions of the gas bombard those elements that are relatively negative at that moment. Voltage, e.g., -200 volts DC, is applied to the biased member 44 which is used in conjunction with the AC-excited element array 21 and increases the cathode current density, e.g., by 60% at a cathode voltage of 5 kV AC (RMS) and a current of 500 ma and pressure of 30×10^{-3} torr.

The resultant bombardment causes a plurality of discrete surface tantalum atoms or particles of the bombarded elements 22 and 22' to be ejected therefrom and combine with the nitrogen atoms, contained in the reactive gas mixture, e.g., 2.3 volume percent nitrogen, remainder argon (N_2 introduced at a rate of 0.6 cc/min.). The combined tantalum and nitrogen atoms are then deposited, e.g., at a rate of 350 Å/min. at 5,000 volts AC, field bias of -200 volts DC and pressure of 30×10^{-3} torr., on the substrate 15 to form layer 18 comprising N-doped beta tantalum.

It is of course to be understood that various AC sputtering parameters, having a broad range, may be employed to obtain N-doped beta tantalum and the parameters given above are exemplary only and not limiting. The various parameters are well known in

the sputtering art and their interdependency, with respect to producing essentially only N-doped beta tantalum without producing b.c.c. tantalum or other tantalum-nitrogen compounds of distinct crystalline structure, e.g., Ta_3N (hexagonal close packed), TaN (sodium chloride structure), can be easily ascertained by one skilled in the art. The various AC sputtering parameters are not critical except for the ratio of tantalum atoms to nitrogen atoms existing during the sputtering. It is important that the amount of nitrogen atoms introduced into the system, in the form of a reactive nitrogen containing gas, e.g., N_2 , NH_3 , etc., and combined with the tantalum atoms does not exceed an upper limit which converts the beta tantalum crystalline structure into the body-centered cubic structure. Such a conversion can be easily ascertained by constantly monitoring the sheet resistivity of the resultant sputtered films since there is a sharp drop of sheet resistivity when the N-doped beta tantalum is being converted to the body-centered cubic structure as is shown in Figure 2.

The nitrogen contained in the resultant N-doped sputtered film, having a beta tantalum crystalline structure, is present therein in an effective amount, ranging from a minimum, which is more than an incidental impurity concentration, to a maximum, that raises the sheet resistivity of the resultant sputtered film above that of undoped beta tantalum (essentially nitrogen free), sputtered under identical sputtering parameters. Typically, the nitrogen concentration present in the resultant sputtered film may range from trace amounts, e.g., about 0.1 atomic percent, to about 10 atomic percent of nitrogen, whereby a N-doped beta tantalum film is obtained without conversion to a b.c.c. structure. In other words, where vapour deposition techniques are employed, e.g. reactive sputtering, the ratio of tantalum atoms to nitrogen atoms which impinge on a substrate surface typically ranges from about 9 to 999/1.

The structural properties of the resultant nitrogen-doped beta tantalum film appear to be similar to those of pure undoped beta tantalum. Measurements by X-ray diffraction indicate that nitrogen incorporation (doping) into the resultant deposited film produces little effect on the crystalline structure of the film.

Nitrogen-doped beta tantalum may also be produced in a closed-end vacuum machine of the type disclosed in U.S. 3,521,765. This closed-end machine employs an entrance and an exit air lock, through which a continuous flow of substrates, on which nitrogen-doped beta tantalum is to be sputtered, passes. Each substrate is introduced through the entrance air lock and is carried, by a conveyor chain, into a central sputtering or deposition

chamber, where it receives a coating of sputtered material. The substrate then passes into the exit air lock and is removed.

The substrates, e.g., glass, ceramics, are passed through the deposition chamber generally parallel to a tantalum cathode at a distance of from 2-1/2 to 3 inches from the cathode. The cathode is generally rectangular in shape and has a width, i.e., the dimension transverse to the direction of travel of the substrates, from 5 to 6 inches greater than the width of the substrates. The substrates are driven past the cathode in a centered relationship with respect to the width of the cathode so that the cathode extends from 2-1/2 to 3 inches beyond either side of the substrates. Before entering the deposition chamber the substrates are outgassed by preheating in vacuum for about ten minutes at a temperature above 150°C.

In operation, the deposition chamber is pumped down to approximately 2×10^{-6} torr. Again, a reactive gas mixture, e.g., 1.8 volume percent N_2 (the N_2 being introduced typically at a flow rate of 0.8 cc/min.), remainder argon, is introduced into the deposition chamber, e.g., at a flow rate of 45 cc/min., to bring the pressure up to a predetermined value, e.g., 30×10^{-3} torr. After the requisite pressure is obtained, e.g., 30×10^{-3} torr., DC voltage, e.g., 5,000 volts, is impressed between the substrate and the cathode. This voltage impression produces a plasma, i.e., ionizes the gases (inert and reactive) contained in the gaseous mixture, whereby a sputtering cathode current density, e.g., 2 mA/in.², at a voltage of 5,000 volts DC and pressure of 30×10^{-3} torr., is created and deposition, e.g., at a rate of 200 Å/min., at 5,000 volts DC, 30×10^{-3} torr., and 1.8 ma/in.², of a N-doped beta tantalum film on the substrate is obtained.

Various DC sputtering parameters, having a broad range, may be employed to obtain nitrogen-doped beta tantalum. The various sputtering parameters are well known in the sputtering art and their interdependency, with respect to producing essentially only N-doped beta tantalum which is essentially free of b.c.c. tantalum or other tantalum-nitrogen compounds, e.g., Ta_2N , can be easily ascertained by one skilled in the art. The various DC sputtering parameters are not critical, provided, of course, that the parameter of nitrogen atom concentration, as compared to the tantalum atom concentration, incorporated into the system and the resultant film is controlled (as discussed previously and graphically illustrated in Figure 2).

It is to be understood that a source of nitrogen, e.g., a solid nitride, may be combined with the tantalum, e.g., by sintering, to form the elements 22 and 22', having a proper nitrogen atom-to-tantalum atom ratio,

whereupon bombardment thereof during the sputtering operation will produce the desired nitrogen-doped beta tantalum layer 18. It is also to be understood that like beta tantalum, an alloy comprising nitrogen-doped beta tantalum and at least one other suitable material, metallic or non-metallic, may be formed by co-sputtering thereof.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate a typical thin-film capacitor generally indicated by the numeral 61. Capacitor 61 includes a base electrode 62, preferably comprising a thin film of nitrogen-doped beta tantalum, deposited upon a suitable dielectric substrate 63, e.g., glass, ceramic. A dielectric film 64 comprising oxidized beta tantalum, preferably oxidized N-doped beta tantalum, covers a selected area of electrode 62 and a counterelectrode 66, e.g., a gold counterelectrode, having an 80 weight percent nickel, 20 weight percent chromium adhesion layer, overlies the dielectric film 64. The dielectric film 64 separates the electrodes 62 and 66 to form the thin-film capacitor 61.

In the fabrication of the capacitor 61, the nitrogen-doped beta tantalum layer 62 is first deposited on the substrate 63, utilizing techniques and apparatus described previously. The N-doped beta tantalum layer deposited on the substrate 63 is then shaped to conform to the electrode 62 by conventional means, e.g., etching. A preferred shaping method is disclosed in British Patent Specification No. 1,153,485 which reveals a photoetching technique. Subsequent to shaping the electrode 62, the dielectric film 64 is readily formed by anodizing a selected area of the electrode 62. A suitable anodizing process which may be employed for converting N-doped beta tantalum to an oxidation product thereof, e.g., an oxide, is disclosed in British Patent Specification No. 896,071. By masking the electrode 62, anodization of the electrode 62 is restricted to a preselected area.

Counterelectrode 66 may be deposited by vacuum evaporation of a conductive material, e.g., nickel and chromium (80% Ni, 20% Cr) followed by gold, onto the dielectric film 64 through a suitable mask. Alternatively, counter-electrode 66 may be formed by evaporation followed by etching to shape. The dielectric film 64 separates and spaces the counterelectrode 66 from the base electrode 62 to form the capacitor 61.

Suitable N-doped beta tantalum capacitor films show increases in bulk resistivity, typically ranging from about 10 to about 50% higher than that of similarly deposited pure beta tantalum films, depending, of course, upon the degree of nitrogen incorporated. Also, the temperature coefficient of resistivity of nitrogen-doped beta tantalum films generally tend to be more negative

than similarly deposited pure beta tantalum films. Although pure beta tantalum films can be fabricated into excellent capacitors, tests of capacitor reliability, capacitance density, environmental sensitivity, temperature coefficient of capacitance and dissipation factor show that capacitors produced from nitrogen-doped beta tantalum films are at least equal in these properties to their non-nitrogen-doped counterparts and can be considered as representative of an improvement there-over.

Nitrogen-doped beta tantalum films which produce good capacitors can be fabricated over a wide range of sputtering conditions. In other words, the processing parameters are not critical in producing high-quality capacitor films when nitrogen atoms (in controlled amounts) are introduced into the sputtering system. In this regard, it has been found that when such nitrogen-doped beta tantalum films are in the process of being deposited in a continuous sputtering machine, such as the closed-end machine described in U.S. Patent 3,521,765, that a convenient relative measure of nitrogen content in the films may be determined by thermoelectric power measurements.

Although the thin-film capacitor 61 has an N-doped beta tantalum base electrode 62, other conductive materials may be used. For example, normal tantalum, beta tantalum, tantalum nitride, niobium, etc., may be employed. When another conductive material is employed as the base electrode 62, a thin film of N-doped beta tantalum is deposited over the electrode 62 and subsequently oxidized to form the dielectric film 64 of N-doped beta tantalum oxide. Any process suitable for the fabrication of normal tantalum thin-film capacitors as well as beta tantalum thin-film capacitors may be used to fabricate N-doped beta tantalum thin-film capacitors.

In the communications industry, a useful criterion in meeting circuit requirements for capacitors is DC leakage current under specified test conditions. Tantalum thin film capacitors having a Ta_2O_5 dielectric layer, formed by anodizing a beta tantalum thin film (N-doped or undoped) in a room temperature anodizing electrolyte at 230 volts DC for one hour, have a capacitance density of about 56 nanofarads ($\pm 3\%$) per square centimeter of counterelectrode area. Such capacitors having DC leakage currents of less

than 2 amperes per farad of capacitance with 55 volts DC applied for 15 seconds have been found to be reliable and suitable for device use.

A typical conventional leakage current test is carried out by applying 55 volts DC between the base electrode 62, e.g., N-doped beta tantalum electrode, and the counterelectrode 66, e.g., nickel and chromium-gold, with the base electrode 62 biased positively with respect to the counterelectrode 66. The leakage current is measured by a suitable instrument 15 seconds after the voltage is applied. Tests conducted on nitrogen-doped beta tantalum film capacitors have low DC leakage levels and consistently high yields based on the above-described DC leakage current criteria which allows up to 2 amperes per farad of capacitance with 55 volts DC applied for 15 seconds.

The present embodiment of the invention has been described mainly in terms of cathodic sputtering of nitrogen-doped (N-doped) beta tantalum thin films for fabricating capacitors.

In this regard, the N-doped beta tantalum may be sputtered from any standard cathode sputtering apparatus known in the art, including direct current, e.g., conventional bell-jar apparatus, and alternating current (high frequency and otherwise) apparatus, which may or may not be electrically biased. Also, it will be appreciated that the resultant N-doped beta tantalum material can be employed wherever undoped beta tantalum can be employed, e.g., in resistor fabrication.

EXAMPLE I

A. A plurality of glass slides $4\frac{1}{2}'' \times 3\frac{3}{4}'' \times 0.050''$, commercially obtained, were each coated with an approximately 1,000 Å thick layer of thermally oxidized Ta_2O_5 . The Ta_2O_5 layer was prepared by thermally oxidizing a 500 Å thick pure beta tantalum film for about 5 hours at 550°C in air. The Ta_2O_5 coated slide or substrate was then processed through a closed-end vacuum apparatus, of the type disclosed in U.S. 3,521,765, at a rate of 20 substrates/hour. Direct current sputtering of beta tantalum films having a thickness of about 4,000 Å was then carried out in three successive runs at a sputtering pressure of 30×10^{-3} torr and a substrate temperature of 300°C. The sputtering conditions for these three runs were as follows:

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Run No.	Sputtering Voltage, Volts	Conditions Current, ma	Nitrogen Doping Rate (cc/min.)	Argon Input Rate (cc/min.)	Film Deposition Rate (Å/min.)
115					
1	4200	500	0.8	45	190
2	4200	500	None	45	190
3	4200	500	0.8	45	190

The run numbers correspond to the chronological order of deposition runs. Thus, Run No. 1 was carried out first and Run No. 3 last. As can be seen from the above table, the three runs were identical except that the product of Run No. 2 was a pure undoped beta tantalum deposit.

A plurality of circuits comprising 10 capacitors each, similar to those described in Figures 3 and 4, having a total capacitance of 47 nanofarads per circuit were then fabricated. For each capacitor, the resultant deposited beta tantalum film (doped and undoped) was etched to shape by a conventional photolithographic technique to form a base electrode 62 of the capacitor 61 (Figures 3 and 4). The electrode 62 was suitably masked and anodized in a dilute (0.01 weight percent) citric acid solution maintained at 25°C, for one hour at 230 volts DC to form a dielectric film 64, comprising an oxidation product of N-doped beta tantalum. A counterelectrode 66, comprising a 500Å

adhesive layer of 80 weight percent Ni, 20 weight percent Cr and a 10,000Å layer of gold was evaporated on the dielectric film 64. The counterelectrode 66 was shaped to a desired configuration by a conventional photoresist and etching technique.

The circuits, each comprising ten resultant capacitors 61, were then subjected to a DC leakage current test by applying 55 volts DC between the base electrodes 62 (connected electrically in parallel) and the counterelectrodes 66. The base electrodes 62 were biased positively with respect to the counterelectrodes 66. The leakage current was then measured with a conventional instrument after 15 seconds of voltage impressment. This leakage current test of the circuits (containing 10 capacitors each) is more stringent than testing the individual capacitors themselves. Since each circuit has a total capacitance of 47 nanofarads, an allowable leakage current is 94×10^{-9} amperes. The leakage current test results were as follows:

	Run No. 1 (Nitrogen Doping)	Run No. 2 (No Doping)	Run No. 3 (Nitrogen Doping)
Total No. of Circuits Tested (10 capacitors/circuit)	3299	892	1176
Circuits With Leakage Less than 25×10^{-9} amperes	1910 (57.8%)	21 (2.4%)	830 (70.6%)
Circuits With Leakage 25 to 50×10^{-9} amperes	592 (17.9%)	74 (8.3%)	104 (8.8%)
Circuits With Leakage 50 to 93.5×10^{-9} amperes	145 (4.4%)	72 (8.2%)	25 (2.1%)
Circuit Yield, Percent	80.2%	18.9%	81.5%

B. A plurality of the substrates of Example I—A were processed at a speed of 20.5 substrate/hour through the in-line vacuum apparatus of Example I—A. Direct current sputtering of N-doped beta tantalum films (ca. 4,000Å thick) was then carried out at a sputtering pressure of 30×10^{-3} torr., in a gas ambient comprising argon and nitrogen (1.0 volume percent nitrogen, where the nitrogen was introduced into the system at a flow rate of 0.3 cc/min.), at a substrate temperature of 300°C, at a cathode voltage of 4,000 volts DC, at a cathode current of 420 ma, at a current density of 1.6 ma/in.² and at a sputtering deposition rate of 150Å a minute.

The resultant N-doped beta tantalum deposited substrates were then fabricated into capacitors as described in Example I—A. The nitrogen content of the nitrogen-doped capacitor films was calculated to range from 2.3 to 4.0 atomic percent for the plurality of samples sputtered under the above sputtering conditions.

C. The procedure of Example I—A was repeated with a plurality of substrates which were processed at a speed of 30 substrates/hour through the in-line vacuum apparatus of Example I—A. Direct current sputtering of N-doped beta tantalum films (ca. 4,000Å thick) was carried out at a sputtering pressure of 30×10^{-3} torr., in a gas ambient comprising argon and nitrogen (2.7 volume percent nitrogen, where the nitrogen was introduced into the system at a flow rate of 1.2 cc/minute), at a substrate temperature of 350°C, at a cathode voltage of 4,500 volts DC, at a cathode current of 800 ma, at a current density of 2.9 ma/in.² and at a sputtering deposition rate of 300Å/minute.

The resultant N-doped beta tantalum deposited substrates were then fabricated into capacitors as described in Example I—A. The nitrogen content of the nitrogen-doped capacitor films was calculated to range from 4.8 to 7.9 atomic percent for the plurality of samples sputtered under the above sputtering conditions.

EXAMPLE II

A. A sputtering apparatus similar to that shown in Figure 1 was used to sputter a nitrogen-doped beta tantalum film 18 on a substrate 15 of Example I—A. The cathodic array 21 of the apparatus 17 comprised six 9" long $\times$ 3/8" diameter high purity tantalum elements 22 and 22', spaced 1-9/16" apart, centre to centre. The sputtering chamber 19 was evacuated to a pressure of 2×10^{-6} torr, after flushing with argon gas. A gaseous mixture comprising argon and nitrogen was then admitted through inlet 53 into the sputtering chamber 19 at a flow rate of 25 cc/min. to raise the pressure to 30×10^{-3} torr. The N_2 was mixed with the argon gas from source 57 at a flow rate of 0.6 cc/minute, whereby a nitrogen gas concentration of 2.3 percent by volume of the resultant gaseous mixture of argon and nitrogen was established.

The substrate 15 was maintained at a temperature of 200°C and sputtering was carried out at a cathode voltage of 5,000 volts AC, a cathode current of 500 ma, a field bias voltage of -200 volts DC, and a field bias current of 240 ma. After 12 minutes, a 3,840 Å sputtered nitrogen-doped beta tantalum film 18 was obtained on the thermally grown Ta_2O_5 layer of the substrate 15. The resultant N-doped beta tantalum film 18 had a nitrogen content of at least 3.5 atom percent as determined by spectrophotometric analysis.

B. The procedure of Example II—A was repeated except that a plurality of the N-doped beta tantalum film deposited substrates of Example II—A were obtained and used in the fabrication of a plurality of capacitors similar to that described in Figures 3 and 4.

The resultant plurality of N-doped beta tantalum capacitors were each subjected to a potential of 50 volts DC for one minute at a temperature of 25°C, whereby leakage current measurements were undertaken. An average leakage current of 0.37×10^{-9} amperes per device was exhibited by the capacitors. An acceptable leakage current under such conditions is 11×10^{-9} amperes/device.

WHAT WE CLAIM IS:—

1. A composition of matter comprising nitrogen-doped beta tantalum containing at least 0.1 atomic percent nitrogen.
2. A composition as claimed in claim 1,

wherein the nitrogen is present in an amount of not more than 10 atomic percent.

3. An electrical component comprising a substrate having a film of nitrogen-doped beta tantalum containing at least 0.1 atomic percent nitrogen.

4. An electrical component as claimed in claim 3, wherein the nitrogen in the film is present in an amount of not more than 10 atomic percent.

5. An electrical component as claimed in claim 3 or claim 4, wherein the component is a thin-film capacitor.

6. An electrical component as claimed in claim 5, wherein the capacitor comprises two electrodes having therebetween a dielectric film comprising an oxidation product of nitrogen-doped beta tantalum.

7. An article as claimed in claim 6, wherein one of the electrodes contains nitrogen-doped beta tantalum.

8. A method of forming nitrogen-doped beta tantalum comprising sputtering tantalum in an atmosphere comprising an inert gas and including a nitrogen atoms-containing gas and adjusting the concentration of the nitrogen atoms-containing gas to a value whereat the tantalum combines with the nitrogen atoms and deposits on a substrate a nitrogen-doped beta tantalum film containing from 0.1 to 10 atomic percent nitrogen.

9. A method as claimed in claim 8, wherein the tantalum is sputtered by applying an electric bias to a tantalum source; which comprises a plurality of tubular elements having a bore through which coolant may be passed, the elements being arranged in a row and connected to an AC bias source so that in use during one half cycle of the applied AC bias at least one element is negatively biased with respect to its adjacent element, the applied electric bias ionizing the at least some of the nitrogen gas or nitrogen containing gas, the ions bombarding the tantalum to produce discrete tantalum atoms.

10. A method as claimed in claim 9, wherein a DC bias is additionally applied to the elements.

11. A method as claimed in any one of claims 8—10, wherein the nitrogen atoms-containing gas is nitrogen.

12. A method as claimed in any one of claims 8—11, wherein the nitrogen atoms-containing gas is ammonia.

13. A thin film capacitor substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and

EXAMPLE II

A. A sputtering apparatus similar to that shown in Figure 1 was used to sputter a nitrogen-doped beta tantalum film 18 on a substrate 15 of Example I—A. The cathodic array 21 of the apparatus 17 comprised six 9" long $\times$ 3/8" diameter high purity tantalum elements 22 and 22', spaced 1-9/16" apart, centre to centre. The sputtering chamber 19 was evacuated to a pressure of 2×10^{-6} torr. after flushing with argon gas. A gaseous mixture comprising argon and nitrogen was then admitted through inlet 53 into the sputtering chamber 19 at a flow rate of 25 cc/min. to raise the pressure to 30×10^{-3} torr. The N_2 was mixed with the argon gas from source 57 at a flow rate of 0.6 cc/minute, whereby a nitrogen gas concentration of 2.3 percent by volume of the resultant gaseous mixture of argon and nitrogen was established.

The substrate 15 was maintained at a temperature of 200°C and sputtering was carried out at a cathode voltage of 5,000 volts AC, a cathode current of 500 ma, a field bias voltage of -200 volts DC, and a field bias current of 240 ma. After 12 minutes, a 3,840Å sputtered nitrogen-doped beta tantalum film 18 was obtained on the thermally grown Ta_2O_5 layer of the substrate 15. The resultant N-doped beta tantalum film 18 had a nitrogen content of at least 3.5 atom percent as determined by spectrophotometric analysis.

B. The procedure of Example II—A was repeated except that a plurality of the N-doped beta tantalum film deposited substrates of Example II—A were obtained and used in the fabrication of a plurality of capacitors similar to that described in Figures 3 and 4.

The resultant plurality of N-doped beta tantalum capacitors were each subjected to a potential of 50 volts DC for one minute at a temperature of 25°C, whereby leakage current measurements were undertaken. An average leakage current of 0.37×10^{-9} amperes per device was exhibited by the capacitors. An acceptable leakage current under such conditions is 11×10^{-9} amperes/device.

WHAT WE CLAIM IS:—

1. A composition of matter comprising nitrogen-doped beta tantalum containing at least 0.1 atomic percent nitrogen.

2. A composition as claimed in claim 1,

wherein the nitrogen is present in an amount of not more than 10 atomic percent.

3. An electrical component comprising a substrate having a film of nitrogen-doped beta tantalum containing at least 0.1 atomic percent nitrogen.

4. An electrical component as claimed in claim 3, wherein the nitrogen in the film is present in an amount of not more than 10 atomic percent.

5. An electrical component as claimed in claim 3 or claim 4, wherein the component is a thin-film capacitor.

6. An electrical component as claimed in claim 5, wherein the capacitor comprises two electrodes having therebetween a dielectric film comprising an oxidation product of nitrogen-doped beta tantalum.

7. An article as claimed in claim 6, wherein one of the electrodes contains nitrogen-doped beta tantalum.

8. A method of forming nitrogen-doped beta tantalum comprising sputtering tantalum in an atmosphere comprising an inert gas and including a nitrogen atoms-containing gas and adjusting the concentration of the nitrogen atoms-containing gas to a value whereat the tantalum combines with the nitrogen atoms and deposits on a substrate a nitrogen-doped beta tantalum film containing from 0.1 to 10 atomic percent nitrogen.

9. A method as claimed in claim 8, wherein the tantalum is sputtered by applying an electric bias to a tantalum source; which comprises a plurality of tubular elements having a bore through which coolant may be passed, the elements being arranged in a row and connected to an AC bias source so that in use during one half cycle of the applied AC bias at least one element is negatively biased with respect to its adjacent element, the applied electric bias ionizing the at least some of the nitrogen gas or nitrogen containing gas, the ions bombarding the tantalum to produce discrete tantalum atoms.

10. A method as claimed in claim 9, wherein a DC bias is additionally applied to the elements.

11. A method as claimed in any one of claims 8—10, wherein the nitrogen atoms-containing gas is nitrogen.

12. A method as claimed in any one of claims 8—11, wherein the nitrogen atoms-containing gas is ammonia.

13. A thin film capacitor substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and



illustrated in Figures 3 and 4 of the accompanying drawings.

14. A method of making nitrogen-doped beta tantalum substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to Figures 1 and 2 of the accompanying drawings.

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Printed for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by the Courier Press, Leamington Spa, 1975.
Published by The Patent Office, 25 Southampton Buildings, London, WC2A 1AY, from which copies may be obtained.