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SOLDERABLE WAVEGUIDE ANTENNA

Abstract

Described herein is a waveguide that is configured to be soldered to a printed circuit board (PCB) via one or more metallic portions disposed thereon. Additionally, the waveguide may have solder disposed within through holes that is configured to conduct heat from one or more components of the PCB when the waveguide is mounted to the PCB. Also described herein is an assembly comprising the waveguide soldered to the PCB via solder between the metallic portions of the waveguide and metallic portions of the PCB. Techniques for producing the waveguide and the assembly are also described herein. By soldering the waveguide to the PCB, an inexpensive, precise, and secure mechanical bonding may be achieved while electrically sealing features of the waveguide and/or components of the PCB. Furthermore, the solder within the through holes allows for better heat conduction through the waveguide.

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Background/Summary

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS [0001] This application is a divisional of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/812,770, filed on Jul. 15, 2022. The entire disclosure of the above application is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Radio frequency (RF) waveguide antennas (e.g., waveguides) are often attached to printed circuit boards (PCB) for various reasons (e.g., packaging, signal preservation, cost). Conventional techniques of affixation often rely on screws (or other fasteners) or pressure sensitive adhesives (PSA). While such techniques may affix the waveguides to the PCBs, they often fail to do so in a cost effective and/or precise manner (e.g., with proper alignment and/or with proper standoff heights of one or more apertures relative to the PCBs).

SUMMARY

[0003] This document is directed to a solderable waveguide antenna, assemblies thereof, and associated methods. Some aspects described below include an RF waveguide. The RF waveguide has a plastic body with a waveguide channel that has an aperture configured to mate with a corresponding RF port of a PCB. The RF waveguide also has a plurality of dimples on one or more external surfaces of the plastic body and one or more waveguide metallic portions disposed on the dimples.

[0004] Some aspects described below include an assembly that includes a PCB with an RF port and one or more PCB metallic portions. The assembly also includes a waveguide that has a waveguide channel with an aperture aligned with the RF port of the PCB and one or more waveguide metallic portions disposed on one or more external surfaces of the waveguide. The waveguide metallic portions correspond to the PCB metallic portions. The assembly further includes solder disposed between the waveguide metallic portions and the PCB metallic portions.

[0005] Some aspects described below include a method. The method includes obtaining a plastic waveguide comprising a plurality of dimples and depositing solderable metal on the dimples to form one or more waveguide metallic portions. The method also includes obtaining a PCB comprising one or more PCB metallic portions and adhering solder balls to the waveguide metallic portions and/or the PCB metallic portions. The method further includes arranging the plastic waveguide proximate the PCB such that the solder balls are in contact with the waveguide metallic portions and the PCB metallic portions and applying heat to the PCB or the plastic waveguide effective to melt the solder balls and affix the plastic waveguide to the PCB.

[0006] This Summary introduces simplified concepts of a solderable waveguide antenna that are further described in the Detailed Description and Drawings. This Summary is not intended to identify essential features of the claimed subject matter, nor is it intended for use in determining the scope of the claimed subject matter.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] A solderable waveguide antenna, assemblies thereof, and associated methods are described with reference to the following drawings, which may use some of the same numbers throughout to reference like or examples of like features and components.

[0008] FIG. 1 illustrates, in accordance with this disclosure, an example environment where a solderable waveguide antenna may be implemented.

[0009] FIG. 2 illustrates, in accordance with this disclosure, a cross section of an assembly of a solderable waveguide antenna.

[0010] FIG. 2A illustrates, in accordance with this disclosure, a detailed cross section of the assembly of a solderable waveguide antenna.

[0011] FIG. 3 illustrates, in accordance with this disclosure, a view of a solderable waveguide antenna with solder balls attached thereto.

[0012] FIG. 4 illustrates, in accordance with this disclosure, an example method of manufacturing a solderable waveguide antenna.

[0013] FIG. 5 illustrates, in accordance with this disclosure, an example method of attaching a solderable waveguide antenna to a PCB.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Overview

[0014] RF waveguide antennas (e.g., waveguides) are often attached to PCBs for various reasons (e.g., packaging, signal preservation, cost). Conventional techniques of affixation often rely on screws (or other fasteners) or pressure sensitive adhesives (PSA). While such techniques may affix the waveguides to the PCBs, they often fail to do so in a cost effective and/or precise manner (e.g., alignment and/or standoff heights of one or more apertures relative to the PCBs).

[0015] Described herein is a waveguide that is configured to be soldered to a PCB via one or more metallic portions disposed thereon. Additionally, the waveguide may have solder disposed within through holes that is configured to conduct heat from one or more components of the PCB, such as a Monolithic Microwave Integrated Circuit (MMIC), when the waveguide is mounted to the PCB. Also described herein is an assembly comprising the waveguide soldered to the PCB via solder between the metallic portions of the waveguide and metallic portions of the PCB. Techniques for producing the waveguide and the assembly are also described herein. For example, the metallic portions of the waveguide may be deposited onto a plastic body of the waveguide and such that the metallic portions may be soldered to corresponding metallic portions on the PCB.

[0016] By soldering the waveguide to the PCB, a cheap, precise, and secure mechanical bonding may be achieved while electrically sealing features of the waveguide (e.g., an aperture) and/or components of the PCB (e.g., a waveguide port, a MMIC). For example, ball grid arrays (e.g., solder balls) are low cost and easy to manufacture, can control aperture to port electrical isolation, and allow for a precise standoff height and alignment of the waveguide relative to the PCB. Furthermore, the solder within the through holes allows for better heat conduction through the waveguide than traditional waveguides.

Example Environment

[0017] FIG. 1 illustrates an example environment **100** where a solderable waveguide antenna may be implemented. The example environment **100** contains a vehicle **102**. The vehicle **102** may be any vehicle type (taxi, car, truck, motorcycle, e-bike, boat, air vehicle, and so on). The vehicle **102** contains an RF assembly **104** comprising a PCB **106** and a waveguide antenna **108** attached thereto. The RF assembly **104** may be configured for any type of RF communication (e.g., V2X, 5G, radar). For example, the RF assembly **104** may be configured as a radar assembly where the waveguide antenna **108** is configured for transmission and/or reception of radar signals. The waveguide antenna **108** may be configured as an air waveguide antenna, a dielectric filled waveguide, have multiple antennas and/or channels, or otherwise be configured as any other

waveguide known to those in the art. The PCB **106** may be a bare circuit board or have one or more components attached thereto (e.g., a MMIC) prior to assembly with the waveguide antenna **108** [0018] Although shown as being disposed within the vehicle **102**, it should be noted that the RF assembly **104** may be configured for other environments. For example, the RF assembly **104** may be configured for a residential environment, commercial environment, mobile or stationary environment, marine environment, and/or space environment.

Example Assembly

[0019] FIG. **2** illustrates a cross section of the RF assembly **104**. The RF assembly **104** has the PCB **106** and the waveguide antenna **108**. In the illustrated example, the RF assembly **104** also has an enclosure **200** and a radome **202**. The waveguide antenna **108** is at least partially formed of a plastic material with one or more metallic portions **300** disposed thereon, as discussed further in regard to FIG. **3**. The PCB **106** also has metallic portions **107** that correspond to the metallic portions of the waveguide antenna **108**, such that the waveguide antenna **108** can be attached to the PCB **106** via solder **204** between the corresponding metallic portions. The solder **204** may be any type of solder. In order to not melt the plastic material of the waveguide antenna **108**, the solder **204** may be a low melting point solder, such as Sn/Bi or In/Sn.

[0020] Although the solder **204** is illustrated as circular cross sections between the waveguide antenna **108** and the PCB **106**, the solder **204** may take any shape after the solder has been reflowed (e.g., melted) to create the RF assembly **104**. For example, the solder **204** may start as solder balls (e.g., a ball grid array on the waveguide antenna **108** and/or the PCB **106**) and flow under heat to produce the RF assembly **104**, such that the solder **204** forms one or more contiguous portions. The contiguous portions may surround (or at least partially surround) an aperture **206** of a waveguide channel **208** of the waveguide antenna **108**, such that the aperture **206** and/or a corresponding RF port **210** of the PCB **106** may be electrically sealed, for example, protected or shielded from Electro Magnetic Interference (EMI).

[0021] In the illustrated example, a monolithic microwave integrated circuit (MMIC) **212** is attached to the PCB **106** via solder **214**. The solder **214** may be a different solder than that of solder **204**. For example, the solder **214** may be a higher temperature solder because the MMIC **212** may not have the same thermal restrictions as the plastic material of the waveguide antenna **108**. It should be noted that the MMIC **212** may be mounted/soldered to the PCB **106** prior to the waveguide antenna **108** being attached to the PCB **106**.

[0022] Opposite the solder **214** on the MMIC **212** is a thermal interface material (TIM) **216**. Within the waveguide antenna **108** and proximate the TIM **216** is solder **218**. The solder **218** may contact the TIM **216** and provide a path for heat conduction between the TIM **216** and an external surface **220** of the waveguide antenna **108**. As such, the cavities in which the solder **218** is disposed may be considered as thermal vias through the waveguide antenna **108** (e.g., through holes). In this way, the RF assembly **104** may provide better cooling of the MMIC **212** than the use of a waveguide antenna that does not have the solder **218**.

Example Waveguide Antenna

[0023] FIG. **3** illustrates the waveguide antenna **108** with some of the solder **204** and the solder **218** disposed thereon. FIG. **3** illustrates the waveguide antenna **108** as it may be configured for attachment to the PCB **106**.

[0024] The waveguide antenna **108** has a plurality of apertures **206** in multiple locations. It should be noted that any configuration of apertures **206** (including height from a surface of the waveguide antenna **108**) may be used without departing from the scope of this disclosure.

[0025] Surrounding some of the apertures **206** is the solder **204**. The solder **204** may be disposed in an array around and in between the apertures **206**. The solder **204** may be attached to waveguide metallic portions **300** disposed on a plastic body **302** of the waveguide antenna **108**. As shown in FIG. **2A**, the waveguide metallic portions **300** (e.g., depositions of the solderable metal) may cover dimples of the plastic body **302** underneath the solder **204** (e.g., a dimple for each solder ball of the

solder **204**). The dimples may be in-molded dimples (e.g., part of the plastic body **302**) which enable the solder **204** to stay in a specific location. The solder **204** at least partially surrounds the apertures **206** in order to provide shielding after assembly with the PCB **106**.

[0026] It should be noted that solder **204** may be disposed on both waveguide metallic portions **300** in the illustrated example; however, some of the solder **204** is not shown (e.g., in the upper waveguide metallic portion **300**) to better illustrate the corresponding waveguide metallic portion **300** and the surface to which it is disposed.

[0027] Also illustrated is a surface **304** and the solder **218** disposed therethrough (e.g., within thermal vias). The surface **304** is configured to be proximate the MMIC **212**, such that the solder **218** can contact the TIM **216**. For example, the surface **304** may be flush, raised (as illustrated), or tilted relative to an adjacent surface depending upon the configuration of the MMIC **212** or any other component that can benefit from the heat transfer provided by the solder **218**. The surface **304** may also be within a cutout or recess formed by the apertures **206** and/or other portions of the plastic body **302** (e.g., for packaging) such that the MMIC **212** may be surrounded (e.g., on a plurality of sides) by the waveguide antenna **108** when the waveguide antenna **108** is assembled to the PCB **106**. In other words, the MMIC **212** (or any other component of the PCB **106**) may be at least partially encapsulated by the waveguide antenna **108** when assembled. Accordingly, the waveguide antenna **108** may have any number and/or configuration of surfaces **304** for respective components.

[0028] Depending on implementation, the surface **304** may have a waveguide metallic portion **300** disposed thereon or not. A waveguide metallic portion **300** on the surface **304** may enable better heat transfer between portions of the solder **218**.

Example Methods

[0029] FIG. **4** is an example method **400** of manufacturing a solderable waveguide antenna. At **402**, a waveguide comprising a plastic body with one or more surfaces configured to mate with corresponding surfaces of a PCB is obtained. For example, the plastic body **302** of the waveguide antenna **108** may be obtained with surfaces corresponding to the waveguide metallic portions **300** (but without the waveguide metallic portions **300** disposed thereon).

[0030] At **404**, a solderable metal is deposited onto the surfaces to create respective metallic portions. The metallic portions are solderable features for the solder **204**. For example, a conductive and/or solderable metal (e.g., copper, tin, silver, or an alloy thereof) may be deposited, such as via a Physical Vapor Deposition (PVD), onto the surfaces of the plastic body **302** to create depositions which form the waveguide metallic portions **300** (e.g., physical vapor depositions). A blocking screen may be used such that locations of the waveguide metallic portions **300** may be controlled (e.g., only around apertures **206**, around the surface **304** to electrically seal/shield the MMIC **212**, in other locations for structure mounting to the PCB **106**). The waveguide metallic portions **300** may cover dimples of the plastic body **302** used to house/locate solder.

[0031] Optionally, at **406**, solder is deposited onto the metallic portions. For example, the solder **204** may be deposited on the waveguide metallic portions **300** within the dimples (e.g., metallurgically bonded). The solder **204** may form a ball grid array and be deposited/adhered to the waveguide metallic portions **300** via various known processes. The solder **204** may be deposited as 0.2 to 0.5 mm balls and placed at a pitch (e.g., distance from each other). By placing the solder **204** onto the waveguide antenna **108**, the waveguide antenna **108** may be ready for assembly with the PCB **106**. It should be noted that the solder **204** may be deposited to the PCB **106**, either alternatively or in conjunction, or as part of the assembly process.

[0032] As part of step **406**, or in addition to it, solder may also be deposited within thermal vias of the plastic body (if the waveguide is configured with such). For example, the solder **218** may be deposited within the through holes of the plastic body **302** (e.g., proximate the TIM **216**, proximate the MMIC **212**).

[0033] FIG. **5** is an example method **500** of attaching a solderable waveguide antenna to a PCB. At

502, a waveguide comprising one or more waveguide metallic portions and a PCB comprising PCB metallic portions that correspond to the waveguide metallic portions are obtained. For example, the waveguide antenna **108** (with the waveguide metallic portions **300**) and the PCB **106** (with its metallic portions) may be obtained.

[0034] Optionally, at **504**, solder balls are deposited on at least one of the waveguide metallic portions or the PCB metallic portions. Depending upon implementation, the solder balls may already be disposed on one or both of the waveguide metallic portions or the PCB metallic portions (e.g., as part of manufacturing the respective parts), thereby obviating step **504**. For example, if it doesn't already exist, the solder **204** may be deposited on the waveguide metallic portions **300** or the PCB metallic portions of the PCB **106**.

[0035] At **506**, the waveguide is arranged proximate the PCB such that the solder balls are in contact with the waveguide metallic portions and the PCB metallic portions. For example, the waveguide antenna **108** may be arranged proximate the PCB **106** such that the apertures **206** are aligned with respective RF ports **210**. The locations of the waveguide metallic portions **300** and the corresponding PCB metallic portions align when the apertures **206** and RF ports **210** are aligned with each other (e.g., due to locations of the respective metallic portions relative to the apertures **206** and RF ports **210**).

[0036] At **508**, heat is applied to the PCB or the waveguide which causes the solder balls to melt, thereby affixing the waveguide to the PCB. While heating, the arrangement of the PCB and the waveguide may be maintained, such that proper alignment (e.g., aperture to RF port standoff and alignment) is maintained. For example, heat may be applied to the PCB **106** or the waveguide antenna **108** effective to melt the solder **204**. The heat may be a low temp reflow heat, such as 160° C. The alignment of the apertures **206** to their respective RF ports **210** may be maintained during the heating process.

[0037] Optionally, at **510**, heat is applied to the waveguide effective to melt solder within one or more thermal vias. Step **510** may be performed if the waveguide contains the thermal vias. For example, heat may be applied to the waveguide antenna **108** effective to melt the solder **218** into the thermal vias of the surface **304** such that the solder **218** is thermally connected to an underlying component (e.g., the MMIC **212** via the TIM **216**). The solder **218** may then provide a heat transfer path from the underlying component to an external surface (e.g., the external surface **220**).

Further Examples

[0038] Some additional examples of a sheet metal enclosure with an array of extruded heat transfer holes and a method related thereto are provided below.

[0039] Example 1: An assembly comprising: a printed circuit board (PCB) comprising: a radio frequency (RF) port; and one or more PCB metallic portions; a waveguide comprising a waveguide channel with an aperture aligned with the RF port of the PCB; and one or more waveguide metallic portions disposed on one or more external surfaces of the waveguide, the waveguide metallic portions corresponding to the PCB metallic portions; and solder disposed between the waveguide metallic portions and the PCB metallic portions.

[0040] Example 2: The assembly of example 1, wherein the solder at least partially surrounds the RF port.

[0041] Example 3: The assembly of example 2, wherein the solder is configured to provide electromagnetic interference (EMI) shielding for the RF port.

[0042] Example 4: The assembly of example 1, wherein: the waveguide is formed of a plastic material; and the waveguide metallic portions are a solderable metal disposed on the plastic material of the external surfaces.

[0043] Example 5: The assembly of example 4, wherein the solderable metal comprises copper, tin, silver, or an alloy thereof.

[0044] Example 6: The assembly of example 4, wherein the waveguide metallic portions comprise depositions of the solderable metal on the plastic material.

[0045] Example 7: The assembly of example 6, wherein the depositions of the solderable metal comprise physical vapor depositions (PVD).

[0046] Example 8: The assembly of example 1, wherein: the waveguide comprises dimples on the external surfaces; and the waveguide metallic portions and the solder are disposed within the dimples.

[0047] Example 9: The assembly of example 1, wherein: the PCB comprises a monolithic microwave integrated circuit (MMIC); and the waveguide comprises: a cutout configured to surround the MMIC; and through holes disposed within the cutout.

[0048] Example 10: The assembly of example 9, further comprising a radome disposed opposite the cutout.

[0049] Example 11: The assembly of example 9, further comprising solder disposed within the through holes and thermally connected to a thermal interface material (TIM) of the MMIC.

[0050] Example 12: The assembly of example 9, wherein the solder is configured to provide electromagnetic (EMI) shielding for the MMIC.

[0051] Example 13: The assembly of example 1, wherein the solder comprises a tin/bismuth, indium/tin, or other low melting point solder.

[0052] Example 14: A radio frequency (RF) waveguide comprising: a plastic body comprising: a waveguide channel with an aperture configured to mate with a corresponding RF port of a printed circuit board (PCB); and a plurality of dimples on one or more external surfaces of the plastic body; and one or more waveguide metallic portions disposed on the dimples.

[0053] Example 15: A method comprising: obtaining a plastic waveguide comprising a plurality of dimples; depositing solderable metal on the dimples to form one or more waveguide metallic portions; obtaining a printed circuit board (PCB) comprising one or more PCB metallic portions; at least one of: adhering solder balls to the waveguide metallic portions proximate the dimples; or adhering solder balls to the PCB metallic portions; arranging the plastic waveguide proximate the PCB such that the solder balls are in contact with the waveguide metallic portions and the PCB metallic portions; and applying heat to the PCB or the plastic waveguide effective to melt the solder balls and affix the plastic waveguide to the PCB.

[0054] Example 16: The method of example 15, wherein depositing the solderable metal on the dimples comprises a physical vapor deposition (PVD) process.

[0055] Example 17: The method of example 15, wherein: the PCB comprises a monolithic microwave integrated circuit (MMIC); and arranging the plastic waveguide comprises arranging the plastic waveguide such that the plastic waveguide at least partially surrounds the MMIC.

[0056] Example 18: The method of example 17, wherein: the plastic waveguide comprises a plurality of through holes; and the method further comprises: placing solder within the through holes; and applying heat to the plastic waveguide effective to melt the solder.

[0057] Example 19: The method of example 18, wherein: the through holes are proximate the MMIC; and applying the heat to the plastic waveguide comprises causing the solder to flow to a thermal interface material (TIM) of the MMIC.

[0058] Example 20: The method of example 15, wherein: one of the waveguide metallic portions or a plurality of the waveguide metallic portions surrounds an aperture of the plastic waveguide; and applying heat to the PCB or the plastic waveguide causes the solder balls to form an electromagnetic interference (EMI) shield for the aperture.

[0059] Example 21: A method of manufacturing the assembly of any of examples 1-13.

[0060] Example 22: A method of manufacturing the RF waveguide of example 14.

[0061] Example 23: A system configured to perform the method of any of examples 15-20.

CONCLUSION

[0062] While various embodiments of the disclosure are described in the foregoing description and shown in the drawings, it is to be understood that this disclosure is not limited thereto but may be variously embodied to practice within the scope of the following claims. From the foregoing

description, it will be apparent that various changes may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the disclosure as defined by the following claims.

[0063] The use of “or” and grammatically related terms indicates non-exclusive alternatives without limitation unless the context clearly dictates otherwise. As used herein, a phrase referring to “at least one of” a list of items refers to any combination of those items, including single members. As an example, “at least one of: a, b, or c” is intended to cover a, b, c, a-b, a-c, b-c, and a-b-c, as well as any combination with multiples of the same element (e.g., a-a, a-a-a, a-a-b, a-a-c, a-b-b, a-c-c, b-b, b-b-b, b-b-c, c-c, and c-c-c or any other ordering of a, b, and c).

Claims

1. A method comprising: obtaining a plastic waveguide comprising a plurality of dimples; depositing solderable metal on the dimples to form one or more waveguide metallic portions; obtaining a printed circuit board (PCB) comprising one or more PCB metallic portions; at least one of: adhering solder balls to the waveguide metallic portions proximate the dimples; or adhering solder balls to the PCB metallic portions; arranging the plastic waveguide proximate the PCB such that the solder balls are in contact with the waveguide metallic portions and the PCB metallic portions; and applying heat to the PCB or the plastic waveguide effective to melt the solder balls and affix the plastic waveguide to the PCB.
 2. The method of claim 1, wherein depositing the solderable metal on the dimples comprises a physical vapor deposition (PVD) process.
 3. The method of claim 1, wherein: the PCB comprises a monolithic microwave integrated circuit (MMIC); and arranging the plastic waveguide comprises arranging the plastic waveguide such that the plastic waveguide at least partially surrounds the MMIC.
 4. The method of claim 3, wherein: the plastic waveguide comprises a plurality of thru holes; and the method further comprises: placing solder within the thru holes; and applying heat to the plastic waveguide effective to melt the solder.
 5. The method of claim 4, wherein: the thru holes are proximate the MMIC; and applying the heat to the plastic waveguide comprises causing the solder to flow to a thermal interface material (TIM) of the MMIC.
 6. The method of claim 1, wherein: one of the waveguide metallic portions or a plurality of the waveguide metallic portions surrounds an aperture of the plastic waveguide; and applying heat to the PCB or the plastic waveguide causes the solder balls to form an electromagnetic interference (EMI) shield for the aperture.
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