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for Mirage Combat Aircraft**

H. Grosdemange

Societe Europeene de Propulsion

Vernon, FRANCE

G. Schaeffer

Avions Marcel Dassault-Breguet Aviation

Saint Cloud

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THE SEPR 844 REUSABLE LIQUID ROCKET ENGINE FOR MIRAGE COMBAT AIRCRAFT

Hervé GROSDÉMANGE
Société Européenne de Propulsion
Forêt de Vernon
Vernon - FRANCE

Guy SCHAEFFER
Avions Marcel Dassault-Bréguet Aviation
Quai Marcel Dassault
Saint Cloud - FRANCE

ABSTRACT

The SEPR 844 rocket engine for Mirage III combat aircraft is the last version of a bipropellant rocket engine family developed by SEP for aircraft propulsion.

The SEPR 844 is a 15 kN thrust, single-chamber rocket engine. It operates with nitric acid and aircraft supplied kerosene. The ignition is made with a hypergolic nitric acid - TX2 combustion. The chamber is fed by two centrifugal pumps driven by an auxiliary shaft coming from the aircraft turbojet engine. The combustion chamber is regeneratively cooled and operates at 2.35 MPa pressure.

Since December 1961, 275 engines of the SEPR 84 class (SEPR 841 and SEPR 844) have been used operationally in six countries and have completed more than 10000 flights with a 99% success rate and a high availability: These engines demonstrated more than 50 ignitions without removal and can be serviced in less than 15 minutes.

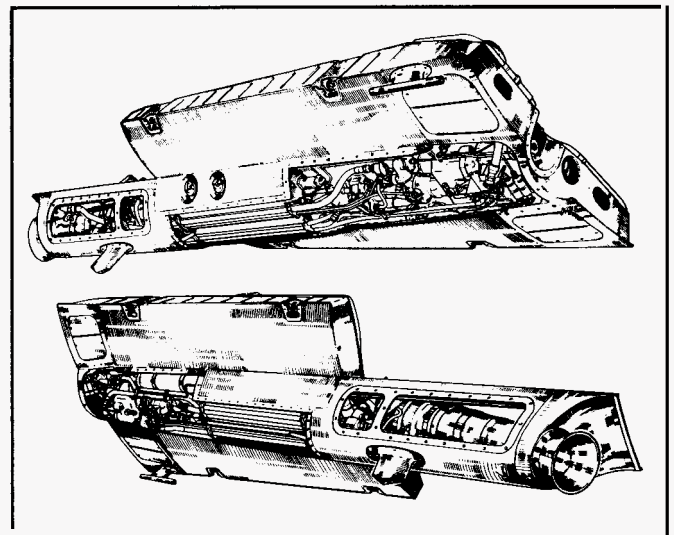


Figure 1 : SEPR 844 Rocket engine.

GENESIS

Set up in late 1944 and specialized in the field of liquid rocket engines, France's SEPR (Société d'Etudes de la Propulsion par Réaction) -now SEP (Société Européenne de Propulsion) -was studying, as early as 1948, the SEPR25. It was a 15 kN thrust rocket engine that made its first bench test in 1950 and its first flight test in 1952 on a SNCASO Espadon. Eighty nine rocket flights allowed the evaluation of aircraft propulsion by rocket engine.

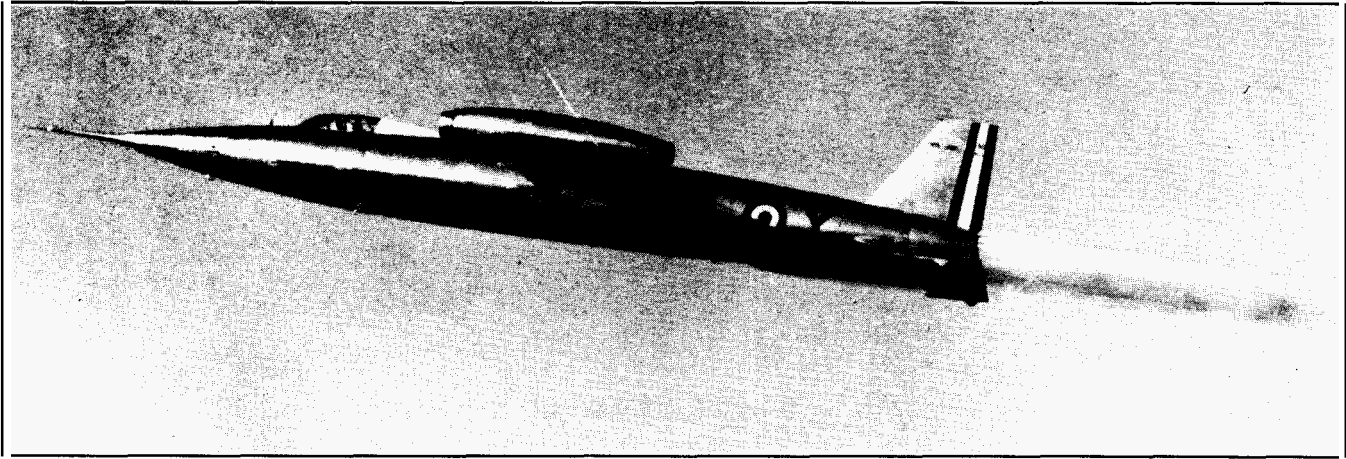


Figure 2 Trident I with one SEPR 481 chamber ignited

Following the French Air Force encouragement to realise very high performances fighters, numerous aircraft manufacturers proposed their rocket propelled aircraft. SEPK developed a propellant family for them with various combinations of single or multichambers, auxiliary driving or turbopump rocket engines. Those engines utilized nitric acid as the oxidizer and furaline or TX as the fuel.

The two SE212 Durandal prototypes made 45 rocket flights with the SEPK 65 auxiliary engine.

The SNCASO Trident was expected to fly with a rocket propellant as the main engine.

In 1954 began the rocket flights on S0 9000 Trident I (see figure 2) with the separated ignition trichambers SEPK 481 (each chamber providing 15kN of thrust).

Afterwards, in 1955, began the rocket flights on S0 9050 Trident II with the multichambers SEPR 63 serie (15 kN per chamber)

These engines operated on nitric acid and furaline, with the propellants fed by turbopump.

A total of 220 rocket flights were performed.

In 1958, a Trident II set three international records of ascensional speed (from zero speed) and one world record of altitude (24.217 meters).

In 1954, Dassault proposed the Mystère IV B05 fitted with the SEPR 660 turbopump/single-chamber rocket engine : forty five rocket flights were completed on and after 1956. An ignition delay at the tenth rocket flight dragged an explosion of the SEPR engine

The Mystère IV B04 was held as test bench for the SEPR 663 and SEPK 631 engines but it made no rocket flight.

On the other hand, Dassault answered the 1953 french fighter program with two delta-wing projects : the MD560 single jet engine and the MD550 twin jet engine. Two prototypes of the latter were ordered. Renamed Mirage I, the MD550-01 made its first flight in June 1955 without rocket engine and eighteen month later with the SEPR 660 : five rocket flights were accomplished. The Mirage II (MD550-02) was never completed due to a modification of the program

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MIRAGE III/SEPR 84 SERIE COUPLE

In late 1955, Dassault launched the Mirage III, using the Mirage II wings and the SNECMA ATAR 101 G turbojet engine. The Mirage III 001 made its maiden flight in November 1956. In July 1957 began the rocket flights with the new SEPK 84 engine.

This auxiliary driven rocket engine, utilizing nitric acid and TX2, offered two thrust levels (7.5 and 15 kN) with a single-chamber : thirty rocket flights were completed.

The Air Force selected the Mirage III and 10 preproduction Mirage III A, improved version powered with the ATAR 9R turbojet engine, were ordered.

From May 1959, the Mirage III A02 (see figure 3) tested the SEPR 840 (15 rocket flights) and SEPK 841 (444 rocket flights), two

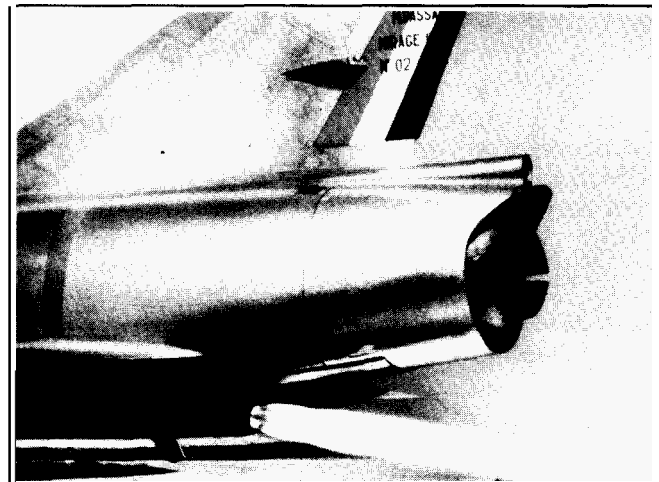


Figure 3 SEPR 841 and Mirage III A02 ground test

nearby variants of the SEPR 84 model, both bench tested the previous year.

The Mirage III C, production fighter equipped with the SEPR 841, made its first flight in 1960 and entered operational service in December 1961.

In February 1962, the SEPR 844, intended for the multipurpose Mirage III E, made its first rocket flight.

The SEPR 844 differs from the SEPR 841 by utilizing kerosene instead of TX2, consequently suppressing the necessity of a specific tank, but complicating the general architecture of the propellant feed system due to the non hypergolicity of the kerosene with nitric acid.

The acid tank is made with stainless steel.

In the lower part of the acid tank is the TX2 (triethylamine and xylydine binary mixture) tank. The TX2, hypergolic with the nitric acid initiates the combustion.

The propellant feed system is made by two centrifugal pumps (the TX2 is in a piston pressurized tank) which are driven by an intermediate shaft coming from the aircraft turbojet engine. The pump impellers and bodies are made with light alloy. A gearing set permits the desired pumps rpm (including the oil pump) and a shear shaft protects the rocket engine from overtorques.

A chemically neutral oil is utilized for the ball bearings and the gears.

A pneumatic controlled clutch provides for the connections-deconnection of the driving shaft.

SEPR 844 TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION

The SEPR 844 is a 15kN thrust rocket engine utilizing HNO_3 nitric acid with corrosive inhibitor contained in a 300 liters partitioned tank, and TR0 or TR4 kerosene stored in a tank of the Mirage III E combat aircraft.

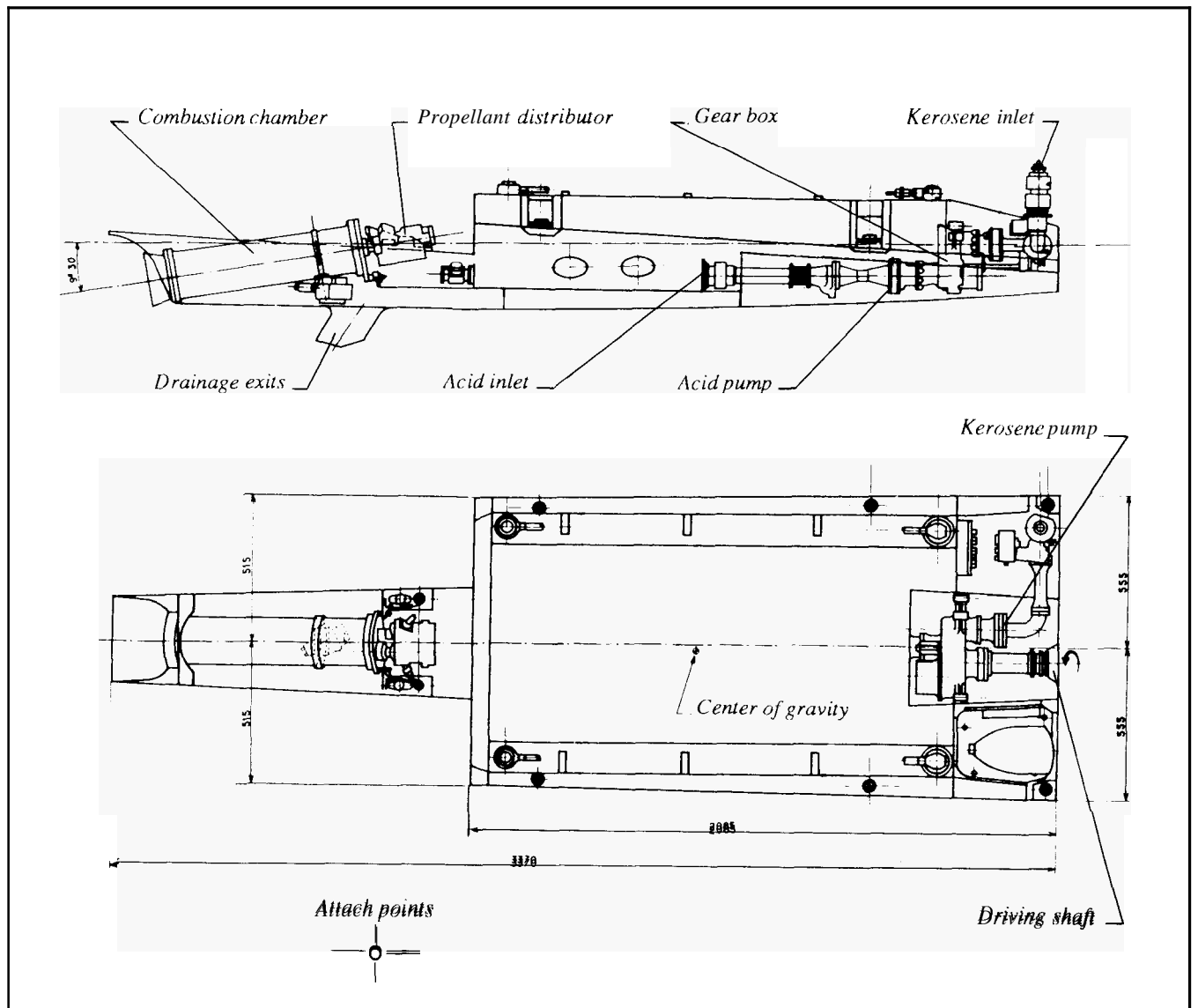


Figure 4 SEPR 844 Engine layout

A self alimented JET PUMP system, which utilizes a part of the pressure given by the pump to increase the average static pressure of the liquid before the pump inlet, is employed for both kerosene and acid pumps to avoid cavitation (see figure 5).

The propellant fed valves open pneumatically and are closed under a spring effort.

The figure 6 shows the entire feed system

The pneumatic system requires 0.8 MPa air contained in a IS MPa pressurized tank.

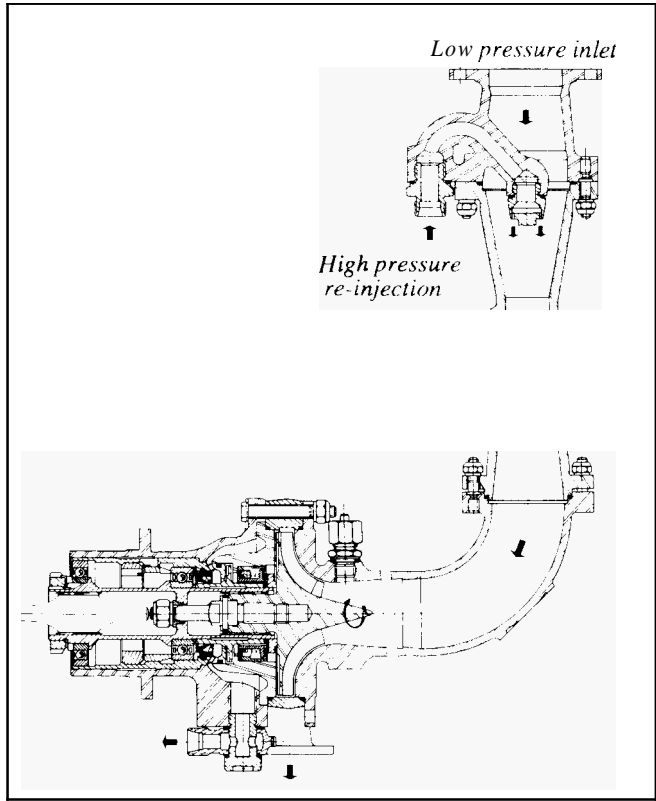
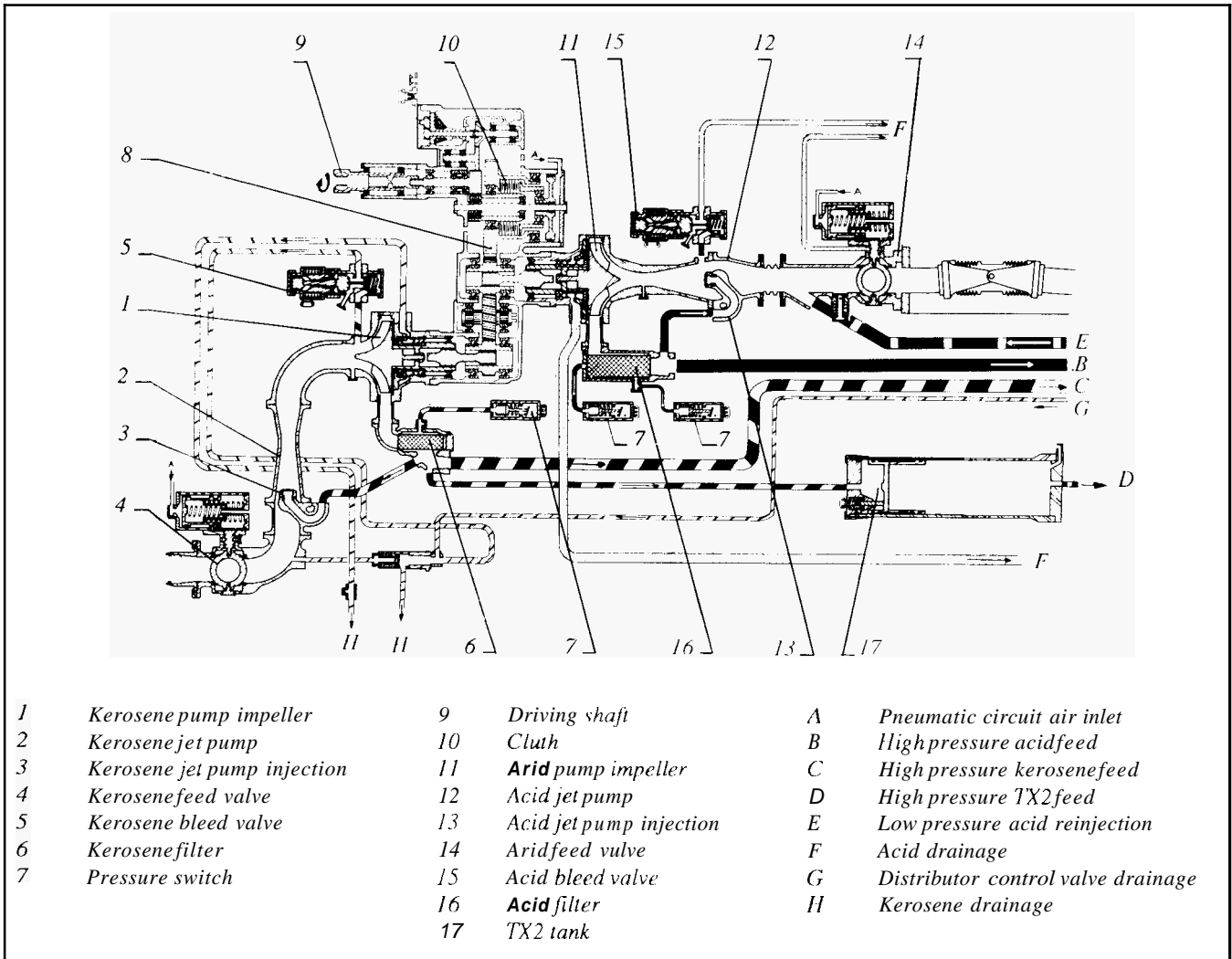


Figure 5 :Kerosene pump

Figure 6 :Feed system



The propellants distribution in the combustion chamber is made with a complex but reliable and safe system (see figure 7). It is composed of a distributor (location 6 in the figure 7) directly coupled to the injection casing, and of a distributor control valve (location 7 in the figure 7). The latter controls the hydraulic feed of the «double stages» distributor actuator (locations 10 and 11 in the figure 7). This actuator controls TX2 and nitric acid valves (locations 13 and 8 in the figure 7) for the ignition (actuator's first stage moving) and then, the kerosene valve (location 12 in the figure 7) and the second acid valve (location 9 in the figure 7) for the steady state rate (actuator's second stage moving). The closure of the TX2 feed for the steady state rate is made with an upstream electric valve (location 18 in the figure 7).

An absolute safety has been introduced in the distribution system : safety for the bad openings or bad closures of the valves, safety in case of propellants total consumption and safety for the jettisoning of the rocket engine.

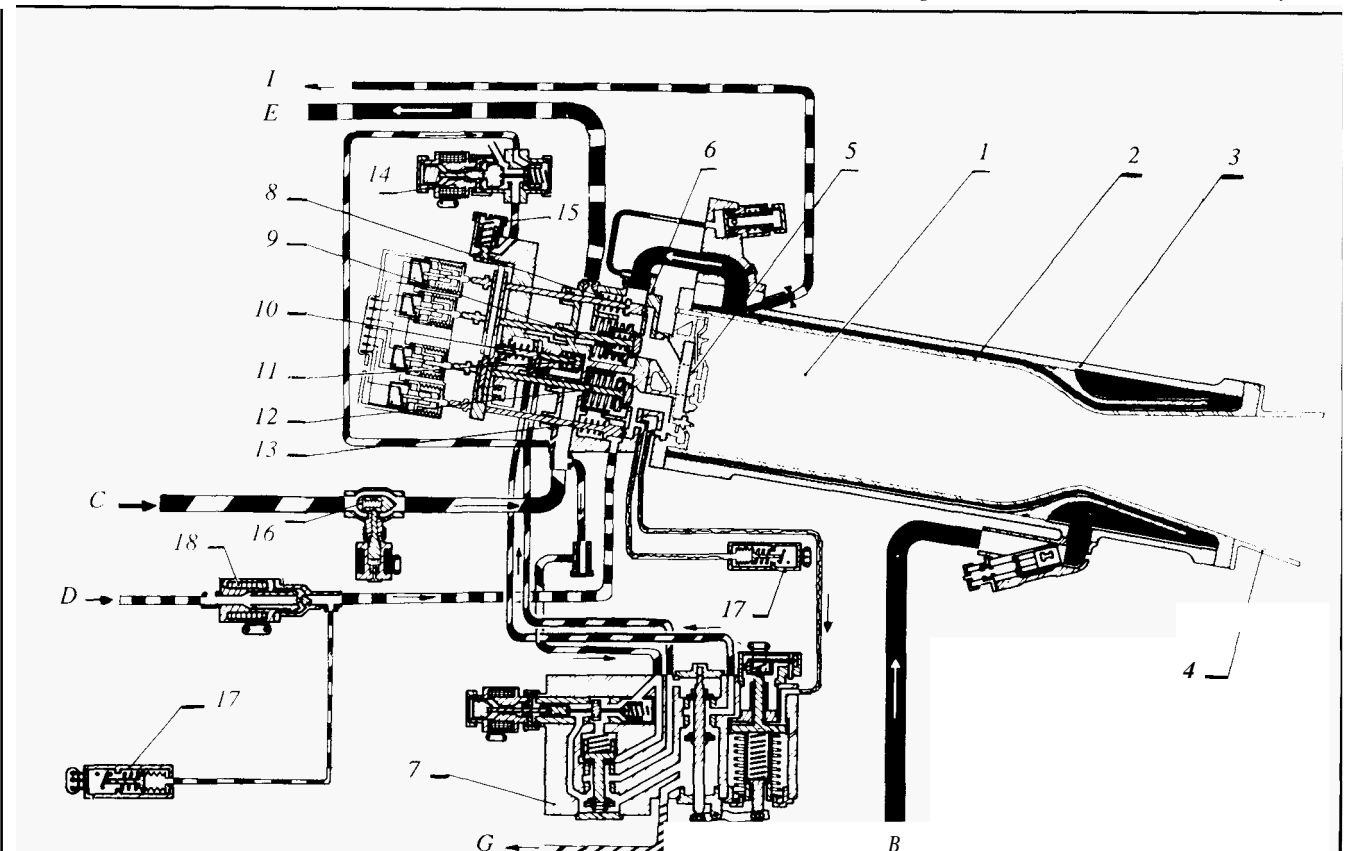
The high pressure kerosene is used as hydraulic fluid.

The combustion chamber is regeneratively cooled with internal circulation of nitric acid in the double wall structure (see figure 7). The guidance and good repartition of the coolant fluid is made by steel wires along the nozzle and by broached fillers along the cylinder part.

The inner wall is fixed at the jacket at one tip and is free at the other tip to permit the longitudinal dilatations.

The chamber combustion system is in aluminium alloy.

Figure 7 : Distribution and chamber system



- | | | | | | |
|---|------------------------------|----|------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Combustion chamber | 10 | Actuator second stage | B | High pressure acid feed |
| 2 | Chamber inner wall | 11 | Actuator first stage | C | High pressure kerosene feed |
| 3 | Chamber external wall | 12 | Kerosene valve | D | High pressure TX2 feed |
| 4 | Nozzle extension | 13 | TX2 valve | E | Low pressure acid reinjection |
| 5 | Injection system | 14 | Jettison control valve | F | Acid drainage |
| 6 | Distributor | 15 | Jettison actuator | G | Distributor control valve drainage |
| 7 | Distributor control valve | 16 | High pressure kerosene valve | I | Low pressure acid tank reinjection |
| 8 | Acid ignition valve | 17 | Pressure switch | | |
| 9 | Acid steady state rate valve | 18 | TX2 closure valve | | |

The stainless steel chamber injector is constituted by injection holes located on three concentric rings : the two internal ones are acid and kerosene impinging doublets and the external one is kerosene injection used as film cooling along the inner wall (see figure 8).

The table 1, below, gives the main characteristics of the SEPR 844 rocket engine.

**TABLE 1
SEPR 844 MAIN CHARACTERISTICS**

Oxidizer	: nitric acid (HN03)
Fuel	: kerosene (TR0 or TR4)
Ignition	: HN03 + TX2
Nominal thrust at sea level, daN	: 1255
Nominal thrust at 20 kms, daN	: 1555
Specific impulse at 20 kms, seconds	: 220
Engine mass flow, kg/sec	: 7.15
Mixture ratio	: 4
Chamber pressure, MPa	: 2.35
OXIDIZER PUMP :	
Inlet pressure, MPa	: ≥ 0.06
Exit pressure, MPa	: 5.3
FUEL PUMP :	
Inlet pressure, MPa	: ≥ 0.1
Exit pressure, MPa	: 4
TX2 tank pressure, MPa	: 3.4
Driving shaft speed, rpm	: 4890
Pumps speed, rpm	: 15500
Weight (without tank), kg	: 158
Acid tank weight, kg	: 82
Maximum flight operating time, sec	: 80

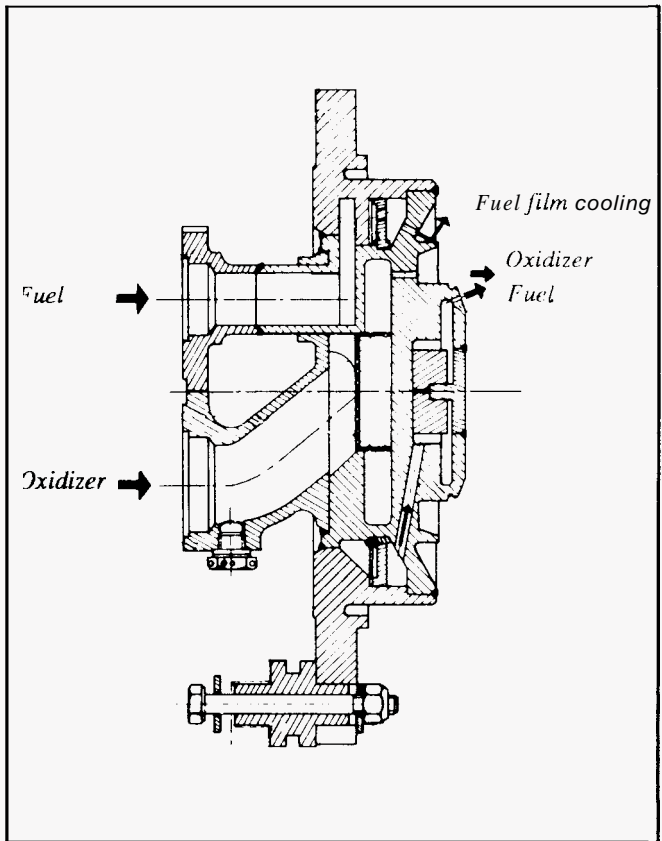


Figure 8 : Chamber injection

The SEPR 844 rocket system is installed in a box between the frames 27 and 36 of the Mirage III E.

Eight attachment points connect the rocket engine to the combat aircraft. Mechanical connectors assure the attachment between the rocket engine shear shaft and the driving shaft coming from the accessories relay of the Mirage ATAR 9C turbojet engine ; hydraulic and electrical connections are also used, the former supplying the kerosene alimentation.

The SEPR 844 thrust axis makes a 9° 30' angle with the aircraft thrust axis (see figure 4).

Finally, it must be pointed out that the rocket system can be jettisoned at low speed.

OPERATIONAL UTILISATION

The SEPK 841 entered operational service in December 1961 at the Dijon Air base. To the end of its operational service in 1970, these engines completed 1505 rocket flights (representing 2064 ignitions).

The SEPK 844 entered operational service in June 1967 at the Colmar Air base.

One hundred and sixty four SEPK 841 and one hundred and eleven SEPK 844 have been produced (see Figure 9) and used operationally in 6 countries : France, Lybia, Pakistan, South Africa, Spain and Switzerland.

More than 10000 rocket flights have been completed with a 99 % success rate.

In its repair planning, the SEPK 844 has to be removed from the Mirage III every 50 ignitions. The most critical parts must be changed : it concerns mainly the acid subsystems like the acid pump, the acid valves, the acid filter. The chamber inner wall must also be changed, but it has been demonstrated operationally that this element can complete 70 ignitions without any damage.

There is no routine bench test after such subsystems removal but, a test is needed when the rocket engine is totally disassembled (every 200 ignitions or after 15 months of acid Laying).

The presence of nitric acid never generated maintenance incident.

The maintenance operations are very easy. By way of proof, the NATO «Air Defense» concourse won by the Colmar Squadron in April 1970, and including turn around operations of four identical aircrafts after each mission. The Colmar's Mirage III E equipped with SEPR 844 made turn around times between 12 mn 9 secondes and 14 mn 55 secondes.



Figure 9 SEPR 841 and YLPR 844 production line

The end of the SEPR 844 operational service in the French Air Force happened in 1984.

The Swiss Air Force still utilizes the SEPK 844 rocket engine with its Mirage III S (see figure 10).

From May 1969 to April 1990, the twenty Swiss SEPK 844 have performed 2170 rocket flights, representing 4575 in flights ignitions (for a total of 5699 in flights and ground ignitions).



Figure 10 -Mirage III S and SEPR 844 rocket engine during a ground test.

CONCLUSION

In the fifties, the required performances for a fighter were a very fast climbing to bring the aircraft in a very precise firing angle, due to the limitations of the air to air missiles.

Due to the lack of turbojet engines thrust, the rocket engines (used as main or auxiliary propellant) offered, at that time, the answer with a high thrust/weight ratio.

The modification of combat aircraft needs (multipurpose aircrafts with more range) and the improvements of the air to air missiles. on board radars and turbojet engines performances, made the rocket engines less attractive.

Also, the utilization of acid with the consistent constraints it involves (the navy always refused to have this propellant in its aircrafts-carriers) was a criteria against the concept. The rocket propellant for aircraft, as successful as it was (and still is), had no following.

The SEPK 841 and 844 showed that the rocket propulsion answered well to their required specifications and that the reusability of rocket engine with a high availability can be possible.

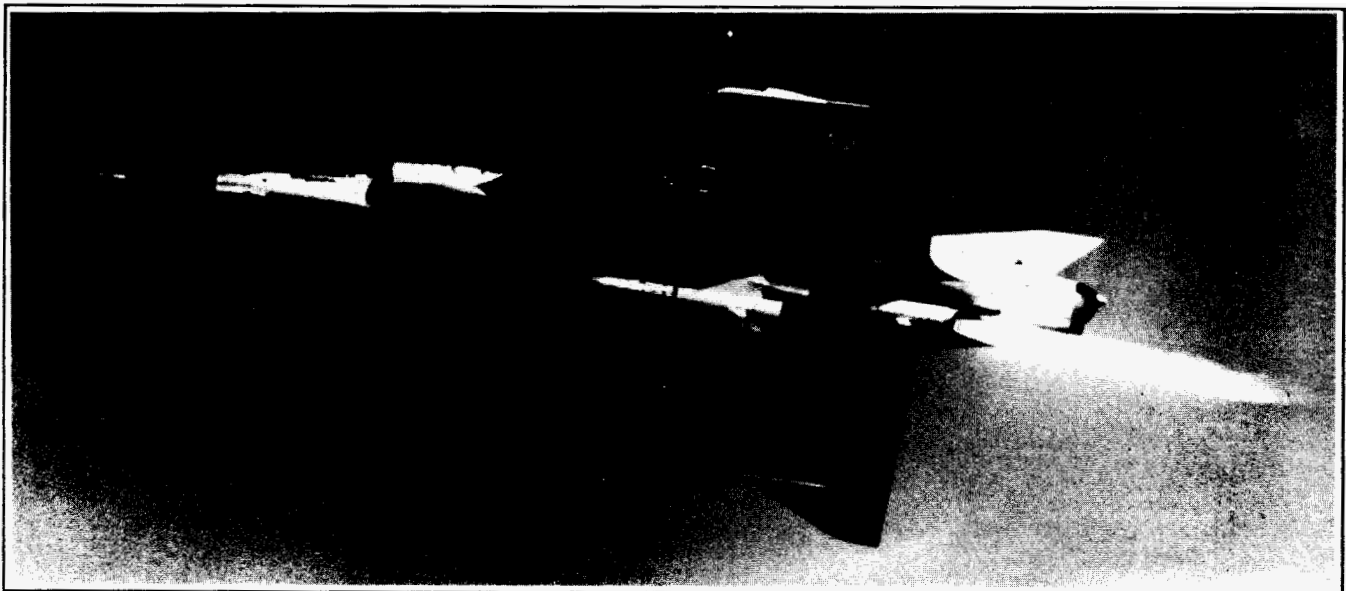


Figure 11: Mirage III C and SEPR 841 rocket engine