Safran Helicopter Engines celebrates its 80th anniversary

Set up in 1938, Turbomeca, now Safran Helicopter Engines, is celebrating its 80th anniversary on September 20, 2018! In its early days when the company manufactured compressors for piston engines, it has enjoyed significant growth and become the world leader in helicopter engines. We take a look back at the saga of the company’s founder, Joseph Szydlowski.

Joseph Szydlowski was born on November 21, 1896 in Chelm, Poland. In 1930, the young Polish engineer emigrated to France where he contributed greatly to building the French aerospace industry.

During the inter-war period, Joseph Szydlowski lived in Germany and became an engineer and inventor. His career in France began in 1930 when the French state commissioned him to manufacture a diesel demonstrator engine. As of 1936, the first patents for "variable circulation" compressors were filed. It was from this point onwards that the company, managed by Joseph Szydlowski over a 50-year period, began to grow.

Two years later, in 1938, he set up Turbomeca with his associate André Planiol with a view to harnessing this invention. In October that year, the first S39 centrifugal compressor, intended for a Hispano-Suiza engine, rolled off the small production line in Boulogne-Billancourt, a suburb of Paris. He went on to buy a plant in Mézières-sur-Seine in order to meet mass production needs.

In 1940, it moved the company to an unoccupied zone in Saint-Pé-de-Bigorre (south-west of France), before moving it again in 1942 to Bordes, near Pau, where it is still located today.

![Turbomeca-JF Bertin](image)

During this period, Turbomeca manufactured turbochargers for gasifier engines. But the Germans were invading the South of France and seized a large proportion of the machines and tools. Joseph Szydlowski fled to Switzerland having entrusted his plant to General Engineer Martinot-Lagarde.

August 1944: the region is liberated. Szydlowski returned to Bordes to get his company back up and running. He re-employed his staff and got hold of the machines again. Turbomeca was back again! Working alongside the engineer Pierre Mauboussin, who managed the aerospace company Fouga, Szydlowski focused operations on designing low-power jet engines for a new range of aircraft including turbine-powered helicopters… This marked the start of a great adventure that would link Turbomeca to helicopter engines. In 1948, testing of Turbomeca's first turboshaft, the TT 782, took place. The 1950s saw the release of the Artouste engine, which would power the Alouette II, the world's first mass-produced turbine-powered helicopter. Building on the success of the first turboshaft, Joseph Szydlowski paved the way for today's best-selling engines such as the Arriel, Arrius or also Makila…

Joseph Szydlowski died at the age of 91, on July 16, 1988, the year Turbomeca celebrated its 50th anniversary.