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DESCRIPTION

[0001] The present invention relates to a method and apparatus for terminating flexible pipe body or re-terminating flexible pipe body. In particular, the present invention relates to end fitting which includes a spacer ring separating a core portion and termination portion of an end fitting to hold those portions in a spaced apart relationship.

[0002] Traditionally flexible pipe is utilised to transport production fluids, such as oil and/or gas and/or water, from one location to another. Flexible pipe is particularly useful in connecting a sub-sea location (which may be deep underwater, say 1000 metres or more) to a sea level location. The pipe may have an internal diameter of typically up to around 0.6 metres (e.g. diameters may range from 0.05 m up to 0.6 m). Flexible pipe is generally formed as an assembly of flexible pipe body and one or more end fittings. The pipe body is typically formed as a combination of layered materials that form a pressure-containing conduit. The pipe structure allows large deflections without causing bending stresses that impair the pipe's functionality over its lifetime. There are different types of flexible pipe such as unbonded flexible pipe which is manufactured in accordance with API 17J or composite type flexible pipe or the like. The pipe body is generally built up as a combined structure including polymer layers and/or composite layers and/or metallic layers. For example, pipe body may include polymer and metal layers, or polymer and composite layers, or polymer, metal and composite layers. Depending upon the layers of the flexible pipe used and the type of flexible pipe some of the pipe layers may be bonded together or remain unbonded. Some flexible pipe has been used for deep water (less than 3,300 feet (1,005.84 metres)) and ultra-deep water (greater than 3,300 feet) developments. It is the increasing demand for oil which is causing exploration to occur at greater and greater depths (for example in excess of 8202 feet (2500 metres)) where environmental factors are more extreme. For example in such deep and ultra-deep water environments ocean floor temperature increases the risk of production fluids cooling to a temperature that may lead to pipe blockage. In practice flexible pipe conventionally is designed to perform at operating temperatures of -30°C to +130°C, and is being developed for even more extreme temperatures. Increased depths also increase the pressure associated with the environment in which the flexible pipe must operate. For example, a flexible pipe may be required to operate with external pressures ranging from 0.1 MPa to 30 MPa acting on the pipe. Equally, transporting oil, gas or water may well give rise to high pressures acting on the flexible pipe from within, for example with internal pressures ranging from zero to 140 MPa from bore fluid acting on the pipe. As a result the need for high levels of performance from the pressure armour and tensile armour layers of the flexible pipe body is increased. It is noted for the sake of completeness that flexible pipe may also be used for shallow water applications (for example less than around 500 metres depth) or even for shore (overland) applications.

[0003] Various conventional end fittings are known which are used to terminate a respective end of a segment of flexible pipe body of a flexible pipe. For example EP2492571 illustrates an end fitting which includes a termination portion, a core portion and an outer casing or jacket and which has a stated aim of reducing or eliminating residual tensions produced due to plastic

deformation of tensile armour windings as the flexible pipe body is terminated in an end fitting.

[0004] Whilst the end fitting disclosed in EP2492571 may provide certain advantages it suffers from certain disadvantages which are suffered by many other conventional end fittings. Notably if an inner seal which seals against a fluid retaining layer of the flexible pipe body fails or is inadequately created then the end fitting must be removed in its entirety by cutting through the flexible pipe body, at a position beyond the end fitting, and a whole new (or re-furbished) end fitting secured to the newly made free end of the flexible pipe. This is a time consuming and costly process and can prove impossible in certain environments where a length of flexible pipe body is insufficient to reach a desired target structure when an end of the flexible pipe body has been cut off, shortened and re-terminated.

[0005] Likewise common to many conventional end fittings the ability to provide vent paths or connecting passageways to allow an annulus region or other region of the flexible pipe body to be vented or interconnected is limited. Likewise the provision of vent paths or fluid communication passageways are difficult if not impossible to introduce subsequent to an initial install operation. That is to say conventional end fittings provide limited or non-existent opportunity to retrofit elements which include passageways at desired locations subsequent to manufacture and original installation.

[0006] Still further some conventional end fittings allow axial creep of a fluid retaining layer such as a barrier layer or liner terminated in the end fitting. That is to say the fluid retaining layer can to some extent move laterally within the end fitting. This can create sealing problems. Conventional end fittings provide little or no ability to sense this motion nor indeed to sense other characteristics associated with the fluid retaining layer during use. Rather, in order to assess one or more characteristics associated with the fluid retaining layer, the end fitting and enveloped flexible pipe body must be cut off from a remainder of the flexible pipe and then the new pristine end of the flexible pipe body re-terminated by an entirely new end fitting. Conventionally parts of the flexible pipe body previously secured within the removed end fitting have thereafter been analysed. However, this can cause problems as noted above.

[0007] Still further the deterioration of the polymer fluid retaining layer through the service life is predicted currently using models and projecting from small scale simulation tests. In reality it will be understood by those skilled in the art that the specifics of each application and field dictate that the actual degree of deterioration or aging of the polymer may be somewhat different from that predicted. This becomes critical if it is desired that the equipment condition be analysed in order to extend its life beyond the original intended service life. At present the only means for determining the actual aged condition of the polymer fluid retaining layer is to either remove the pipe from service, cut off an end fitting and analyse the polymer, or to provide polymer test coupons which have to be suspended into contact with the service fluids flowing through the pipe. In many cases however the latter is not an option due to space constraints and the former is too costly.

[0008] Still furthermore conventional end fittings provide little or no ability to heat or cool a fluid

retaining layer or bore fluid as it flows along a central bore defined by the fluid retaining layer of the flexible pipe body. Any heating or cooling that is possible is complicated to apply and cannot simply be retrofitted to an end fitting subsequent to an initial termination process.

[0009] Further relevant prior art is shown in WO-A-014/001236, WO-A-2013/074098, EP-A-2 746 635, WO-A-99/19654 and GB-A-954 051.

[0010] It is an aim of the present invention to at least partly mitigate one or more of the above-mentioned problems.

[0011] It is an aim of certain embodiments of the present invention to provide a method and apparatus that can be used to allow the re-termination of an end fitting whilst ensuring a fluid tight seal can be recreated against a fluid retaining layer, such as a barrier layer or liner and/or outer sheath, of the flexible pipe.

[0012] It is an aim of certain embodiments of the present invention to provide a kit of parts which can be selected responsive to end fitting parts being replaced to thereby enable re-sealing of a barrier layer or liner and/or outer sheath subsequent to a replacement process.

[0013] It is an aim of certain embodiments of the present invention to enable a short section of a fluid retaining layer of a flexible pipe to be removed after use and thereafter analysed for inspection purposes without having to remove an entire end fitting from a flexible pipe and thereafter re-terminate a newly created entirely free end of flexible pipe body.

[0014] It is an aim of certain embodiments of the present invention to provide an end fitting which can always remain substantially attached to an end of a segment of flexible pipe body subsequent to an initial termination process but which allows a part or parts of the end fitting to be replaced once or repeatedly without having to remove the whole of the end fitting.

[0015] It is an aim of certain embodiments of the present invention to provide a method and apparatus for providing a vent path or other such open pathway (such as a pathway for a fibre or the like) to connect with a desired region of a flexible pipe.

[0016] It is an aim of certain embodiments of the present invention to provide a method and apparatus for providing a vent path, for venting annulus fluids of a flexible pipe, in an end fitting.

[0017] It is an aim of certain embodiments of the present invention to provide apparatus for retrofitting one or more parts to an end fitting without having to remove an entire end fitting from an end of a flexible pipe so as to be able to add or change a location of a vent path or other such open passage subsequent to an initial installation process.

[0018] It is an aim of certain embodiments of the present invention to provide a mechanism for controlling a temperature or temperature profile over time of a fluid retaining layer in a flexible

pipe.

[0019] It is an aim of certain embodiments of the present invention to provide one or more sensors or observation ports which can be utilised to selectively monitor one or more characteristics of a fluid retaining layer of a flexible pipe.

[0020] It is an aim of certain embodiments of the present invention to provide a sealed-off-zone of a fluid retaining layer which can be analysed during use but whereby bore fluid pressure or annulus fluid pressure are not experienced.

[0021] According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided an end fitting as defined in claim 1. Preferred embodiments are defined in the dependent claims.

[0022] According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for terminating flexible pipe using an end fitting as defined in claim 1.

[0023] Certain embodiments of the present invention will now be described hereinafter, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 illustrates flexible pipe body;

Figure 2 illustrates uses of flexible pipe;

Figure 3a illustrates parts of a multi-component end fitting;

Figure 3b illustrates a multi component end fitting with a pad eye end cap, spacer ring and associated seal ring;

Figure 4 illustrates an even more schematic view of the end fitting of Figure 3a;

Figure 5 illustrates the end fitting of Figure 4 with certain replaced components;

Figure 6 illustrates a component part being removed;

Figure 7 illustrates parts of a multi-component end fitting;

Figure 8 illustrates the end fitting of Figure 7 with certain replaced components;

Figure 9 illustrates parts of a multi-component end fitting;

Figure 10 illustrates the end fitting of Figure 9 with replaced components;

Figure 11 illustrates providing a fluid seal using a spacer ring and associated seal ring;

Figure 12a illustrates how back-to-back seal rings may be provided;

Figure 12b illustrates how back-to-back seals can be energised with a ring insert member;

Figure 13 illustrates spaced apart sealing rings and a heater element;

Figure 14 illustrates an observation port in a spacer ring in a sealed-off-zone;

Figure 15 helps illustrate a spacer ring having non-parallel sides and gripping of a fluid retaining layer;

Figure 16 helps illustrate the provision of a fluid communication passageway in a spacer ring; and

Figure 17 helps illustrate re-sealing using a replacement spacer ring.

[0024] The embodiments shown in figures 3b, 7, 8, 9-11, 12a, 12b and 15 do not form part of the invention but represent background art useful for understanding the invention.

[0025] In the drawings like reference numerals refer to like parts.

[0026] Throughout this description, reference will be made to a flexible pipe. It is to be appreciated that certain embodiments of the present invention are applicable to use with a wide variety of flexible pipe. For example certain embodiments of the present invention can be used with respect to flexible pipe and associated end fittings of the type which is manufactured according to API 17J. Such flexible pipe is often referred to as unbonded flexible pipe. Likewise, and as described in more detail below, certain other embodiments of the present invention are usable with flexible pipe and associated end fittings for flexible pipe of a composite type structure. Such composite type flexible pipe and its manufacture is currently being standardised by the API. Such flexible pipe can include adjacent tubular layers that are bonded together.

[0027] Turning to Figure 1 it will be understood that the illustrated flexible pipe is an assembly of a portion of pipe body and one or more end fittings in each of which a respective end of the pipe body is terminated. Figure 1 illustrates how pipe body 100 is formed from a combination of layered materials that form a pressure-containing conduit. As noted above although a number of particular layers are illustrated in Figure 1, it is to be understood that certain embodiments of the present invention are broadly applicable to coaxial pipe body structures including two or more layers manufactured from a variety of possible materials. The pipe body may include one or more layers comprising composite materials, forming a tubular composite layer. It is to be further noted that the layer thicknesses are shown for illustrative purposes only. As used herein, the term "composite" is used to broadly refer to a material that is formed from two or more different materials, for example a material formed from a matrix material and reinforcement fibres. Certain other possible examples are described herein below.

[0028] A tubular composite layer is thus a layer having a generally tubular shape formed of composite material. The layer may be manufactured via an extrusion, pultrusion or deposition process or, by a winding process in which adjacent windings of tape which themselves have a composite structure are consolidated together with adjacent windings. The composite material,

regardless of manufacturing technique used, may optionally include a matrix or body of material having a first characteristic in which further elements having different physical characteristics are embedded. That is to say elongate fibres which are aligned to some extent or smaller fibres randomly orientated can be set into a main body or spheres or other regular or irregular shaped particles can be embedded in a matrix material, or a combination of more than one of the above. Aptly the matrix material is a thermoplastic material, aptly the thermoplastic material is polyethylene or polypropylene or nylon or PVC or PVDF or PFA or PEEK or PTFE or alloys of such materials with reinforcing fibres manufactured from one or more of glass, ceramic, basalt, carbon, carbon nanotubes, polyester, nylon, aramid, steel, nickel alloy, titanium alloy, aluminium alloy or the like or fillers manufactured from glass, ceramic, carbon, metals, buckminsterfullerenes, metal silicates, carbides, carbonates, oxides or the like.

[0029] The pipe body 100 illustrated in Figure 1 includes an internal pressure sheath 105 which acts as a fluid retaining layer and comprises a polymer layer that ensures internal fluid integrity. The layer provides a boundary for any conveyed fluid. It is to be understood that this layer may itself comprise a number of sub-layers. It will be appreciated that when a carcass layer 102 is utilised the internal pressure sheath is often referred to by those skilled in the art as a barrier layer. In operation without such a carcass (so-called smooth bore operation) the internal pressure sheath may be referred to as a liner. A barrier layer 105 is illustrated in Figure 1.

[0030] It is noted that a carcass layer where it is used is a pressure resistant layer that provides an interlocked construction that can be used as the innermost layer to prevent, totally or partially, collapse of the internal pressure sheath 105 due to pipe decompression, external pressure, and tensile armour pressure and mechanical crushing loads. The carcass is a crush resistant layer. It will be appreciated that certain embodiments of the present invention are thus applicable to 'rough bore' applications (with a carcass). Aptly the carcass layer is a metallic layer. Aptly the carcass layer is formed from stainless steel, corrosion resistant nickel alloy or the like. Aptly the carcass layer is formed from a composite, polymer, or other material, or a combination of materials. Aptly the carcass layer can be substituted for a bonded reinforcement layer outside of the internal pressure sheath, which also acts as a pressure armour layer 110.

[0031] A pressure armour layer 110 is a pressure resistant layer that provides a structural layer that increases the resistance of the flexible pipe to internal and external pressure and mechanical crushing loads. The layer also structurally supports the internal pressure sheath. Aptly as illustrated in Figure 1 the pressure armour layer is formed from a tubular composite layer. Aptly for unbonded type flexible pipe (not shown) the pressure armour layer consists of an interlocked construction of wires with a lay angle close to 90°. Aptly in this case the pressure armour layer is a metallic layer. Aptly the pressure armour layer is formed from carbon steel, aluminium alloy or the like. Aptly the pressure armour layer is formed from a pultruded composite interlocking layer. Aptly the pressure armour layer is formed from a composite formed by extrusion or pultrusion or deposition or winding of layers of tape material

wherein the layers of pre-impregnated composite tape, or alternate layers of composite tapes and polymer tapes are consolidated and bonded together and also bonded to the internal pressure sheath 105 together forming a bonded pipe body structure.

[0032] The flexible pipe body also includes an optional first tensile armour layer 115 and optional second tensile armour layer 120. Each tensile armour layer is used to sustain tensile loads and optionally also internal pressure. Aptly for some flexible pipes the tensile armour windings are of metal (for example steel, stainless steel or titanium or the like). For some composite flexible pipes the tensile armour windings may be polymer composite tape windings (for example provided with either thermoplastic, for instance nylon, matrix composite or thermoset, for instance epoxy, matrix composite). For unbonded flexible pipe the tensile armour layer is typically formed from a plurality of wires. (To impart strength to the layer) that are located over an inner layer and are helically wound along the length of the pipe at a lay angle typically between about 10° to 55°. Aptly the tensile armour layers are counter-wound in pairs. Aptly the tensile armour layers are metallic layers. Aptly the tensile armour layers are formed from carbon steel, stainless steel, titanium alloy, aluminium alloy or the like. Aptly the tensile armour layers are formed from a composite, polymer, or other material, or a combination of materials.

[0033] Aptly the flexible pipe body includes optional layers of tape (not shown) which help contain underlying layers and to some extent prevent abrasion between adjacent layers. The tape layer may optionally be a polymer or composite or a combination of materials, also optionally comprising a tubular composite layer. Tape layers can be used to help prevent metal-to-metal contact to help prevent wear. Tape layers over tensile armours can also help prevent "birdcaging".

[0034] The flexible pipe body also includes optional layers of insulation 125 and an outer sheath 130, which comprises a polymer layer used to protect the pipe against penetration of seawater and other external environments, corrosion, abrasion and mechanical damage. Any thermal insulation layer helps limit heat loss through the pipe wall to the surrounding environment.

[0035] Each flexible pipe comprises at least one portion, referred to as a segment or section, of pipe body 100 together with an end fitting located at at least one end of the flexible pipe. An end fitting provides a mechanical device which forms the transition between the flexible pipe body and a connector. The different pipe layers as shown, for example, in Figure 1 are terminated in the end fitting in such a way as to transfer the load between the flexible pipe and the connector.

[0036] Figure 2 illustrates a riser assembly 200 suitable for transporting production fluid such as oil and/or gas and/or water from a sub-sea location 221 to a floating facility 222. For example, in Figure 2 the sub-sea location 221 includes a sub-sea flow line 225. The flexible flow line 225 comprises a flexible pipe, wholly or in part, resting on the sea floor 230 or buried below the sea floor and used in a static application. The floating facility may be provided by a

platform and/or buoy or, as illustrated in Figure 2, a ship. The riser assembly 200 is provided as a flexible riser, that is to say a flexible pipe 240 connecting the ship to the sea floor installation. The flexible pipe may be in segments of flexible pipe body with connecting end fittings.

[0037] It will be appreciated that there are different types of riser, as is well-known by those skilled in the art. Certain embodiments of the present invention may be used with any type of riser, such as a freely suspended (free-hanging, catenary riser), a riser restrained to some extent (buoys, chains), totally restrained riser or enclosed in a tube (I or J tubes). Some, though not all, examples of such configurations can be found in API 17J. Figure 2 also illustrates how portions of flexible pipe can be utilised as a jumper 250.

[0038] Figure 3a illustrates an end fitting 300 which can be utilised to terminate an otherwise open end of the flexible pipe body 100. An end fitting of the type illustrated in Figure 3 may be secured to both ends of a segment of flexible pipe body or at only one end with a remaining end of the flexible pipe body being terminated in some other manner. The end fitting 300 is a multi-component end fitting. That is to say the end fitting is comprised of many parts each of which serves a particular purpose supporting and/or sealing specific layers of the flexible pipe body.

[0039] As illustrated in Figure 3a a carcass layer 102 and over lying barrier layer 105 share a common end point 305. This end point defines an end extremity at an end region of the flexible pipe body. The end 305 is surrounded and supported by a termination portion 310 of the end fitting. The termination portion 310 itself includes an open end 315, a neck region 317 and an outwardly extending connecting flange 320. The termination portion 310 is made as an integral unit. The open end 315 of the termination portion of the end fitting can be secured to a rigid structure or another end fitting arranged in a back-to-back configuration. The termination portion has an inner surface 322 which has a substantially cylindrical region having an internal diameter that substantially matches an inner diameter of the carcass layer 102 and a flared out region towards the open end of the termination portion which defines an open mouth of the end fitting. Towards the connecting flange 320 of the termination portion the inner surface 322 of the termination portion is first stepped out and then tapered outwards to receive the ends of the carcass layer and barrier layer and to form a recessed region to receive an inner sealing ring 325. The inner seal ring 325 is a sealing member which includes a foot portion 327 that can be energised against a radially outer surface of the barrier layer and an inner seal ring body 328 which moves with the foot portion 327 and which can be urged into the tapered recess region defined between the radially inner surface of the termination portion of the end fitting and the substantially cylindrical outer surface provided by the barrier layer. It will be understood that other designs of inner (or outer) seal ring may also be used, such as a shape comprising trapezoidal or wedge sections which interface with other similarly angled surfaces on the inner (or otherwise opposed) surface 322 or with additional energising rings included in the end fitting design in order to energise the seal. It will also be understood that the inner (or outer) seal ring material may be metallic, polymeric, composite or a combination of these, without compromising the ability to enable the seal.

[0040] The termination portion 310 of the multi-component end fitting 300 is secured to a core portion 330 of the end fitting 300 via an interposed spacer ring 335. The spacer ring 335 is a ring-like member that has a substantially cylindrical outer surface 337 that forms part of an overall outer surface 340 of the end fitting 300 and a substantially cylindrical radially inner surface 343 which has an inner diameter that substantially matches the dimensions of the outer surface of the fluid retaining barrier layer 105. The spacer ring member 335 thus supports the fluid retaining barrier layer which underlies the spacer ring in use. A first and further side of the spacer ring are substantially parallel and extend between the radially outer surface 337 and radially inner surface 343 of the spacer ring. The sides are substantially parallel and spaced apart. The sides are spaced apart by a width W. A first side 345 of the intermediate spacer ring is opposed to and abuts with an end surface of the connecting flange 320 of the termination portion 310. This end of the termination portion is referred to as a posterior end whilst the first side surface 345 of the spacer ring is referred to as an anterior surface. That is to say for the purpose of explanation only a posterior surface faces towards the right hand side of the figure whilst an anterior surface faces towards the left hand side of a figure. It will be appreciated that this reference system is used for illustration only and that anterior or posterior will be relative to an actual arrangement of end fitting and flexible pipe body in use. The anterior surface of the spacer ring shown in Figure 3 is sealed to the posterior surface of the termination portion of the end fitting 300 via a respective O-ring seal 348. A posterior surface provided by another side of the intermediate spacer ring member 335 abuts with an opposed anterior end surface of the core portion 330 of the end fitting and a respective O-ring seal 350 seals this interface. The O-ring seals 348 and 350 may be O-rings or metallic, elastomeric or polymeric gasket rings of designs familiar to those skilled in the art. Other seal types could of course be utilised.

[0041] As illustrated in Figure 3a the termination portion 310 of the end fitting 300 is secured to the core portion 330 via the spacer ring member using one or more bolts 350. It will be appreciated that other securing mechanisms could of course be utilised. The termination portion, core portion, spacer ring member, seal ring and O-rings are examples of components of an end fitting.

[0042] An outer casing 360, referred to as a jacket, is a substantially cylindrical element which is secured to the core portion 330 of the end fitting. As illustrated in Figure 3 the jacket 360 is secured to the core portion via mating threads 365. Other securing mechanisms could of course be utilised. A substantially cylindrical outer surface 367 of the jacket 360 forms part of the outer surface 340 of the end fitting 300. A radially inner surface 370 of the jacket is spaced apart from a radially outer surface 373 of a neck 380 of the core portion 330 of the end fitting 300. An inner surface of the neck has a region having an interior dimension that matches the radially outer surface of the barrier layer together with a step to receive an end 383 of the pressure armour layer 110.

[0043] The radially outer surface of the neck 380 of the core portion 330 is thus spaced apart from the radially inner surface 370 of the jacket 360 to define an enclosure 385 therebetween.

This enclosure is a chamber or space where ends 387, 388 of respective tensile armour windings 115, 120 can be terminated. The enclosure 385 may be filled with epoxy via an access port 390 during a termination process to fix the ends of the tensile armour windings in place.

[0044] Figure 4 illustrates selected parts of the end fitting 300 shown in Figure 3 in more detail. Much of the end fitting illustrated in Figure 3 is omitted in Figure 4 for the sake of clarity. Figure 4 helps illustrate how a width W of the spacer ring member 335 is a dimension that can be selected to determine how far the core portion 330 and termination portion 310 of the end fitting 300 are spaced apart. As the termination portion is secured to the core portion via the spacer ring member during a flexible pipe end fitting termination process the spacer ring member energises the inner seal ring 325 against the radially outer surface of the barrier layer 105. The width W is a dimension that thus sets an original sealing position 400 in terms of the axial direction. That is to say in terms of a relative position extending axially parallel with the central axis A-A associated with the central bore of the flexible pipe body in the end fitting.

[0045] Figure 5 helps illustrate how an end fitting component (in Figure 5 the spacer ring member) can be removed from a multi-component end fitting and be replaced by a corresponding end fitting component that has a dimension (in Figure 5 a width) different from the original component. In more detail, in the example shown in Figure 5, the core portion 330 and underlying pressure armour layer 110 remain in place as a retained portion of the end fitting but the termination portion 310 has been removed together with an original inner seal ring and original spacer ring. This removal step reveals the end 305 of the barrier layer 105 and underlying carcass layer 102. A short section of the barrier layer and carcass layer has then been removed via a further step by cutting through the barrier layer and carcass layer and then the original termination portion 310 or a similar replacement and either the original inner sealing ring or a replacement inner sealing ring has again been secured to the core portion 330. However in Figure 5 a new spacer ring member having a width different from the original spacer ring has been located between the core portion and termination portion in a step of the re-termination process. As a result when the sealing ring is energised against the fluid retaining layer this occurs at a new sealing location 500 which is axially displaced from an original sealing location 400. This ability to reseal against a liner or barrier layer is helpful as it means an initial faulty seal can be corrected without having to replace an entire end fitting and/or allows a portion of a barrier layer and carcass layer to be removed after being used so that the removed part can be investigated for monitoring purposes. Analysis can occur without having to carry out a conventional re-termination process which would involve cutting off the whole end fitting, thus shortening the flexible pipe and re-fitting a whole new end fitting. It will be understood that depending on the geometry and dimensions of the termination portion 310 it may not be necessary to cut back the barrier and carcass layers of the flexible pipe body in order to relocate the inner seal ring 325.

[0046] It will be likewise appreciated by those skilled in the art that a separate type of connector end may be initially attached in place of the open flanged end connector 310; this alternative arrangement may be assembled with or without the inner seal ring 325 energised.

This alternative type of end connector provides a termination portion that may be an installation end cap 395 incorporating a pad-eye 397 to receive tensioning / hanging equipment (shackles, chains, slings / ropes etc.) which is used to install a pipe subsea, transferring tension loads from the installation equipment to the pipe. This is illustrated in Figure 3b. Once the pipe is installed to the required position the installation end cap is removed and the flange end termination portion 310 is installed along with the energisation of the inner seal ring 325. If the inner seal ring 325 is energised against the spacer ring 335 as illustrated in Figure 3b it may not be necessary to replace or energise this seal later when the installation end cap is replaced with the flanged end connector 310.

[0047] Figures 3a, 3b, 4 and 5 thus illustrate how original end fitting components such as a termination portion 310, inner seal ring member 325 and spacer ring member 355 can be removed from a multi-component end fitting leaving a retained portion of the end fitting in situ. Subsequently superseding end fitting components (a superseding termination portion 310, superseding inner seal ring member 325 and superseding spacer ring member 335) can be secured to the retained portion thus providing a new fluid tight seal against a fluid retaining layer at a new sealing location. The new sealing location is axially displaced from an original sealing location. In the previous described embodiment the superseding components for the termination portion and inner seal ring member can merely involve the re-use of the original parts. Alternatively new previously unused parts having identical size and shape dimensions could of course be utilised. The superseding spacer ring member however has a different shape and size configuration from that original component part which has been removed.

[0048] Figure 6 helps illustrate how instead of removing one or more end fitting components and replacing each removed component with a corresponding replacement component it is possible, according to certain embodiments of the present invention, to remove and not replace an end fitting component. In more detail Figure 6 helps illustrate how during a further re-termination of an end of the flexible pipe the termination portion 310 and inner seal ring member can be removed together with the spacer ring member 535 illustrated in Figure 5. The termination portion 310 and inner seal ring are then re-fitted by securing these directly to the retained core portion 330. As a result a new fluid tight seal is again provided against the fluid retaining layer of the flexible pipe. Again this can be achieved by cutting off a short end section of the barrier layer and carcass layer. The new sealing location 600 is shown offset from the location where the earlier sealing location 500 made with respect to the reduced width spacer ring member 535 shown in Figure 5 is made. It will be appreciated that it would be possible during a re-termination process to merely remove the original spacer ring member 335 illustrated in Figure 4 and cut off a slightly longer section of barrier layer and carcass layer to enable the termination portion 310 to thereafter be secured directly against the core portion 330 as per Figure 6. Thus a superseding end fitting component may be an entirely new component part or may be a reused component part. Likewise one or more component parts may be omitted entirely during a re-termination process rather than changing a dimension of a component part.

[0049] It will likewise be appreciated by those skilled in the art that rather than reducing a width

of an intermediate spacer ring as part of successive re-termination processes wider intermediate spacer ring members may progressively be introduced. This would have a net result of again providing a new fluid tight seal against a fluid retaining layer of a flexible pipe at a new sealing location axially displaced from a preceding sealing location. Re-termination in this manner would of course require a longer free length of barrier layer and carcass layer to be originally provided in a termination portion in the expectation that subsequent re-termination processes would move progressive sealing inner seal ring members away from the core portion 330 of an end fitting as opposed to moving the sealing point nearer to the core portion as described in detail in Figures 4, 5 and 6.

[0050] Figure 7 helps illustrate an alternative re-termination process for an end of a flexible pipe. In many respects the end fitting illustrated is similar to that described with respect to Figures 3 to 6 however the termination portion 710 has an inner surface 722 which is substantially cylindrical towards an open end of the end fitting, stepped out to receive ends of the barrier layer and carcass layer then tapered to receive a foot portion of the inner seal ring member 325. The inner surface 722 also then ends in a substantially cylindrical section in which a ring insert 750 is located. The ring insert is an example of a component of the end fitting. The inner surface 722 of the termination portion 710 illustrated in Figure 7 thus defines a recess between the termination portion 710 and the substantially cylindrical outer surface of the barrier layer. The body of the inner seal ring member 325 and the ring insert member 750 are located in this recessed region. During a termination process the termination portion 710 of the end fitting and core portion 330 of the end fitting are secured together. As this securing action occurs the anterior surface of the core portion 330 is driven against a posterior surface of the ring insert member 750. This urging motion energises the inner seal ring member 325 against the outer surface of the barrier layer. As a result an original sealing location 780 is defined at an axial location along the length of the barrier layer of the flexible pipe.

[0051] Figure 8 helps illustrate how a re-termination of an end of the flexible pipe shown in Figure 7 can be carried out. During the method of re-terminating the end of the flexible pipe the termination portion 710 and inner seal ring member 325 are removed together with the ring insert member 750. Remaining components of the original end fitting are retained in situ so that the terminated ends of the tensile armour windings are unaffected by the removal of the end fitting component parts. As illustrated in Figure 8 a superseding termination portion 810 and superseding inner seal ring member 325 are utilised together with a superseding ring insert member 850. It will be appreciated that the superseding inner seal ring member 325 may be a reused component that has just been removed or may be a new component part having dimensions substantially matching the removed component parts. On the other hand the new ring insert member 850 has a width that is reduced with respect to a corresponding width dimension of the ring insert member 750 illustrated in Figure 7. Likewise the termination portion 810 has a connecting flange 855 that has a width reduced relative to the width of the connecting flange of the removed termination portion 710.

[0052] During a re-termination process the original termination portion and inner seal ring member and original ring insert member 750 are removed and an end section of the barrier

layer and carcass layer may be cut off. The ends of the carcass and barrier layer are revealed when the termination portion, inner seal ring member and ring insert member are removed from the retained portion of the end fitting. After cutting the barrier layer and carcass layer to a suitable length the replacement termination portion 810 is secured to the core portion 330 using bolts or some other suitable securing mechanism thus superseding the original component. As an anterior surface of the core portion 330 contacts the posterior surface of this superseding termination portion the new ring insert member 850 energises the inner seal ring member against an outer surface of the barrier layer at a new sealing location 880. This new sealing location 880 is displaced in an axial direction from a location on the barrier layer where an original sealing location occurs.

[0053] Figure 9 helps illustrate how a re-termination process can occur for an end of a flexible pipe in which a new fluid tight seal is formed against an outer sheath 130 of the flexible pipe. It will thus be appreciated that certain embodiments of the present invention enable the resealing of an inner fluid retaining layer or an outer fluid retaining layer or indeed both an outer and an inner fluid retaining layer. It will also be appreciated that certain embodiments of the present invention can also be utilised to reseal against an intermediate fluid retaining layer located between a barrier layer or liner and an outer sheath.

[0054] As illustrated in Figure 9 the outer sheath 130 of the flexible pipe body is terminated at an end of an end fitting not shown in previous Figures 3 to 8. As illustrated in Figure 9 a posterior end of the jacket 360 at this further end of the end fitting has an inner surface 370 which is tapered to be partially closed but the jacket 360 itself has an end 900 which remains open. An inner surface 910 at the posterior end of the jacket 360 defines a substantially cylindrical surface which is spaced apart from an outer surface provided by an outermost layer of tensile armour windings. An inner collar member 920 is urged between the outer surface of the outermost tensile armour winding layer and an inner surface 925 of the outer sheath 130. An outer spacer ring 935 is a substantially ring-like member that has a substantially cylindrical outer surface 937 which forms part of the outer surface of the end fitting together with a radially inner most surface that includes a substantially cylindrical portion and a tapered and reset region. The substantially cylindrical portion of the outer spacer ring member has a dimension that substantially matches the dimension of the outer surface of the outer sheath. The tapered region of the inner surface of the outer spacer ring member 935 defines a recess in which an outer seal ring 940 can be located. The outer seal ring is a member 940 that includes a foot portion 942 and a body portion 945. The foot portion 942 of the outer seal ring member 940 is urged against the outer surface of the outer sheath 130 when the outer seal ring member is energised thus forming a fluid seal. The outer spacer ring member has an anterior surface which is secured to a posterior surface of the jacket and sealed via a respective O-ring 947. Other sealing mechanisms could of course be used. An anterior end surface of the outer spacer ring member 935 abuts with an anterior surface of a collar 960. As part of a termination process the collar is secured indirectly to the end of the jacket via the intermediate spacer ring member using bolts 965 or other such securing mechanism.

[0055] Figure 10 helps illustrate how, as part of a re-termination process, the outer spacer ring

member can be removed and then replaced by another outer spacer ring member having a width that is smaller than a corresponding width of the preceding outer spacer ring member. As illustrated in Figure 10 a width of the replacement outer spacer ring member can be as little as the width of an outer seal ring member which is used to seal against the outer sheath 130 of the flexible pipe. It will be appreciated that re-terminating the seal of the outer sheath of a flexible pipe whilst leaving the retained portion of the end fitting in situ is complicated by the fact that the collar and outer spacer ring member must be slid down a whole length of the flexible pipe body to a free end to remove those component parts and then new component parts slid along a length of the flexible pipe body. As an alternative it will be appreciated that the outer spacer ring member can be formed as a split ring element as can the collar member. Alternatively the collar member and/or outer spacer ring member can be formed as multiple ring-like elements. When a re-termination process is desired the multiple components are unsecured from a retained portion of the end fitting and undesired parts can be destructively removed leaving pre-existing outer spacer ring member elements or at least one outer spacer ring member element and at least one outer collar member intact to be secured again to an end of the jacket 360 by new, suitably shortened bolts. The outer sheath can be heat treated to mend any grazes or cuts that occur as components are removed.

[0056] It will be appreciated that whilst Figures 9 and 10 have been described in terms of shortening a width of an outer spacer ring member to form a new sealing location a new sealing location could be formed by increasing a width of the outer spacer ring member. This is achieved either by sliding new component parts along a whole length of the flexible pipe body from a free end of the flexible pipe or by relaxing the securing mechanisms and securing in one or more new split ring elements in place to act as spacers.

[0057] Figure 11 illustrates how a multi-component end fitting 1100 can be provided with a termination portion 1110 and a core portion 1130. A spacer ring 1135 is interposed between a posterior end surface 1145 of the termination portion 1110 and an anterior surface 1150 of a core portion of the end fitting. An anterior side surface of the spacer ring abuts with the posterior side surface of the termination portion. The spacer ring 1135 ensures that a whole surface of the posterior end of the termination portion is held in a spaced apart relationship from a whole surface of the anterior surface of the core portion. That is to say the width of the body of the intermediate spacer ring separates the core portion from the termination portion. In Figure 11 and the previous Figures this width is substantially constant but this is optionally not always the case. As illustrated in Figure 11 the radially innermost edge surface 1155 of the seal ring member 1135 has a substantially cylindrical nature including a smooth cylindrical region towards a posterior end of the spacer ring 1135 whilst the inner edge 1155 tapers out towards an anterior end of the spacer ring. The radially innermost surface of the spacer ring defines a recess between the spacer ring and barrier layer where an inner seal ring 1165 is located. That is to say the intermediate spacer ring 1135 can include one or more recessed regions to receive respective seal rings. One of these is illustrated in Figure 11.

[0058] Figure 12a illustrates an alternative arrangement to that shown in Figure 11 whereby in addition to a recess for a seal ring 1165 the termination portion 1210 can likewise include a

recessed region for receiving a respective seal ring 1225. The seal ring 1225 that provides a seal between the termination portion and the outer surface of the fluid retaining layer provides a seal so that bore fluid pressure is not communicated to a location between the back-to-back seal rings. By contrast the seal ring 1165 supported and energised by the intermediate spacer ring provides a seal to prevent annulus fluid pressure being experienced at a location between the back-to-back seal rings. It will be appreciated that a fluid communication port (T) can be provided and this is in fluid communication with a location between the back-to-back seal rings. This port provides a local opening up of the joint between the termination portion 1210 and the intermediate spacer ring 1235, and can be used to ensure external hydrostatic pressure is conveyed to the location between the back-to-back seal rings.

[0059] Figure 12a thus helps illustrate how a double seal arrangement can be utilised. The back-to-back seal arrangement helps provide a first seal location which seals the bore together with a spaced apart further seal location which acts as a back-up seal as well as sealing off the annulus from the part or parts forming the seal at the first seal location. It will be appreciated that a single ring like seal (i.e. one integral unit) including opposed seal elements can be utilised according to certain embodiments of the present invention.

[0060] In Figure 12a the intermediate spacer ring 1235 is secured between a posterior surface of the termination portion 1210 of the end fitting and an anterior surface of the core portion.

[0061] Figure 12b helps illustrate how certain embodiments of the present invention can utilise a ring insert rather than a spacer ring to energise two back-to-back seal rings (or a single integrally formed seal ring that seals at two spaced apart locations).

[0062] As shown in Figure 12b a termination portion 1240 of the end fitting is secured directly against an anterior surface of a core portion 1250. A first seal ring 1260 provides a bore seal whilst an adjacent seal ring 1165 helps provide a back-up seal to stop the annulus receiving the bore pressure and helps seal the annulus off from the bore seal. A ring insert 1270 is driven into a recessed region within the termination portion by the core portion and termination portion being driven/urged together. This energises the seal elements. Spaced apart 'O'-ring seals 1280, 1285 help seal off the fluid route to the annulus.

[0063] A test port 1287 is shown connected to a location between seal locations against the fluid retaining layer via a passageway 1290. Likewise a further test port 1292 is connected to a location between the spaced apart 'O'-ring seals via a respective passageway 1294. This allows the seals to be tested as well as providing the possibility for points between the seal rings to experience a local hydrostatic pressure in use by flooding the test port 1287 and passageway 1290.

[0064] Figure 13 illustrates an alternative arrangement in which back-to-back seal rings 1325, 1365 can be utilised in a multi-component end fitting. In this embodiment neither of the seal rings are supported within the intermediate spacer ring. Rather a first seal ring 1325 which seals against bore fluid pressure is formed in a recess between the termination portion of the

end fitting and the fluid retaining layer. Annulus fluid pressure and annulus fluid generally is sealed via the sealing ring 1365 formed in a recess between the core portion and the outer surface of the fluid retaining layer. Use of two spaced apart seal rings in this manner creates a sealed-off-zone where a respective bore fluid pressure or annulus fluid pressure is not experienced. In Figure 13 this zone is located at the interface between the intermediate spacer ring and the outer surface of the fluid communicating layer.

[0065] Figure 13 also helps illustrate how a heater element 1370 can be supported in the intermediate spacer ring. It will be appreciated that rather than the heater element 1370 or indeed in addition to it one or more cooling elements may likewise be embedded or otherwise supported in the spacer ring. The heaters or coolers are supplied with power or heated or cooled fluid via conventional techniques. The heater element 1370 (or indeed cooler element) may be utilised with any of the embodiments described herein which utilise a spacer ring that is a substantially full width spacer ring. That is to say that extends substantially a whole distance from an outer surface of a fluid retaining layer to an outer surface of an end fitting. It will of course be appreciated that a cap or cover may be located radially outside of the spacer ring. The heater and/or cooler element can be utilised to select and maintain a pre-determined temperature and/or temperature profile over time which can help control build-up of material on the inner bore of the pipe and can help control viscosity of transported fluids.

[0066] Figure 14 helps illustrate how a multi-component end fitting 1400, which includes a termination portion 1410 and core portion 1430, can be kept spaced apart by an interposed spacer ring. As illustrated in Figure 14 a spacer ring 1435 can include at least one observation port 1450 which extends from a radially outer edge surface of the spacer ring member 1435 to a test port or opening 1460 at a radially inner edge surface of the spacer ring member. Because the spacer ring is a full width element analysis and/or observation can be carried out directly onto the outer surface of a fluid retaining layer at a desired moment in time. It will be appreciated that such observation ports and passageways can be utilised with many of the embodiments described herein.

[0067] Figure 15 helps illustrate a multi-component end fitting 1500 which includes a termination portion 1510 and a core portion 1530. An interposed spacer ring 1535 is illustrated in Figure 15. Of note is that the spacer ring 1535 illustrated in Figure 15 does not have substantially parallel spaced apart sides. Rather an anterior side surface 1540 extends substantially orthogonally between a radially inner and radially outer edge surface of the spacer ring whilst a posterior side surface 1560 is stepped. That is to say the posterior side surface of the spacer ring does not extend in a parallel fashion with the remaining side surface of the spacer ring member. It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the shape/configuration of the sides of the spacer ring can be made of any format which substantially mates with an opposed whole anterior end surface of the core portion or indeed a whole posterior end surface of the termination portion. This is true for any of the embodiments described herein.

[0068] Figure 15 also helps illustrate how a spacer ring 1535, can include multiple inset

regions 1570. In Figure 15 six inset regions are illustrated which are formed as independent spaced apart grooves on the inner edge surface of the spacer ring. It will be appreciated that any number of grooves can be utilised according to certain embodiments of the present invention and indeed that a single helical groove could provide the recessed regions. Likewise it will be appreciated that rather than helical grooves or circular grooves single independent recessed regions formed as blind holes or blind slits could be utilised. Likewise the radially inner surface of the spacer ring may alternatively be roughened in any other way to provide inset regions. Because the intermediate spacer ring includes the inset regions, in use, the fluid retaining layer to some extent will be gripped by the spacer ring. This helps prevent or at least reduce a risk of lateral motion (right to left in Figure 15) of the fluid retaining layer terminated in the end fitting. This helps avoid motion of the fluid retaining layer with respect to any sealing ring which may otherwise risk breaking a seal. It will be appreciated that use of a roughened inner surface of a spacer ring may be utilised with any of the embodiments described herein.

[0069] Figure 16 helps illustrate a multi-component end fitting 1600 which includes a termination portion 1610 and core portion 1630. A spacer ring 1635 is illustrated juxtaposed between opposed surfaces of the termination portion 1610 and core portion 1630. That is to say the spacer ring 1635 as illustrated in Figure 16 spaces a whole posterior surface of the termination portion away from a whole anterior surface of the core portion 1630. Figure 16 helps illustrate how a fluid communication passageway 1650 may be formed in an intermediate spacer ring 1635. As illustrated in Figure 16 the fluid communication passageway includes a first portion 1655 which extends in a substantially radial direction from an external port 1660. The fluid communication passageway also includes an axially extending portion 1665 which extends in an axial direction associated with a main axis of a flexible pipe. The fluid communication passageway opens into a groove 1670 which extends around the posterior surface of the spacer ring. This groove and the axially extending passageway providing fluid communication to it are aligned with the pressure armour layer of the flexible pipe body terminated in the end fitting. In this way annulus fluids can be vented. Using a spacer ring which has at least one fluid communication passageway in it can thus be utilised to help vent annulus fluid. Such an intermediate spacer ring can be retrofitted to a terminated flexible pipe by replacing a pre-existing intermediate spacer ring formed as a blank body (i.e. with a fluid communication passageway) with a spacer ring which includes a required fluid communication passageway. It will be appreciated that a spacer ring could include passageways having different shapes. For example curved or labyrinthine lumens can be used, some of which can meet and communicate with each other in order to achieve the same external port 1660.

[0070] Figure 17 helps illustrate how a spacer ring including a fluid communication passageway can be utilised in accordance with certain embodiments of the present invention which enable a re-sealing to occur. That is to say a spacer ring having a width shown in Figure 16 can be replaced by one illustrated in Figure 17 and the termination portion 1610 re-sealed against a pristine region of a barrier layer.

[0071] Throughout the description and claims of this specification, the words "comprise" and "contain" and variations of them mean "including but not limited to" and they are not intended

to (and do not) exclude other moieties, additives, components, integers or steps. Throughout the description and claims of this specification, the singular encompasses the plural unless the context otherwise requires. In particular, where the indefinite article is used, the specification is to be understood as contemplating plurality as well as singularity, unless the context requires otherwise.

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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- WO2013074098A [0009]
- EP2746635A [0009]
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- GB954051A [0009]

PATENTKRAV:

1. Endefitting (300) til afslutning af fleksibelt rørlegeme omfattende:

en endefitting-kernedel (330);

5 en endefitting-afslutningsdel (310) til at omgive og understøtte et fælles endepunkt (305) for lag af et fleksibelt rør; og

et aftageligt afstandsringelement (335), der kan placeres mellem kernedelen (330) og afslutningsdelen (310) til at holde en hel forrest endeflade af kernedelen (330) og en modstående hel bagerst endeflade af afslutningsdelen (310) i et adskilt afstandsforhold;

10 hvor afstandsringelementet (335) er et ringlignende legeme med en radialt inderst kantflade (343) og en radialt yderst kantflade (337) og en bagerst sideflade, der er adskilt fra en forrest sideflade;

hvor den radialt inderste kantflade (343) og radialt yderste kantflade (337) hver omfatter en tilsvarende i alt væsentligt cylindrisk flade; og

15 hvor den forreste sideflade i alt væsentligt er parallel med den bagerste sideflade, og den bagerste sideflade og den forreste sideflade hver strækker sig mellem den radialt inderste kantflade (343) og den radialt yderste kantflade (337); og

hvor den radialt yderste kantflade (337) definerer en udvendig flade, der er en ekstern flade af endefittingen.

20

2. Endefitting ifølge krav 1, hvor

den radialt inderste kantflade (343) definerer en cylindrisk flade med en radius, der er egnet til i alt væsentligt at svare til en radius af en udvendig flade af et fluidtilbageholdelseslag af et fleksibelt rør afsluttet ved en første ende af endefittingen.

25

3. Endefitting ifølge krav 1, hvor

den radialt inderste flade (343) i alt væsentligt er cylindrisk og indbefatter en flerhed af indførringsområder.

30 4. Endefitting ifølge et hvilket som helst af de foregående krav, hvor den forreste sideflade i alt væsentligt strækker sig vinkelret på den radialt inderste kantflade (343) og den radialt yderste kantflade (337).

5. Endefitting ifølge et hvilket som helst af de foregående krav, hvor afstandsringelementet (335) er et enkelt integreret element; eller hvor afstandsringelementet (335) er et flerkomponentelement.

5 **6.** Endefitting ifølge et hvilket som helst af de foregående krav, der endvidere omfatter en hætte eller afdækning radialt uden for afstandsringen (335).

7. Endefitting ifølge et hvilket som helst foregående krav, der endvidere omfatter:
mindst ét opvarmningselement og/eller afkølingselement, der er understøttet i
10 afstandsringelementet (335) til styring af en temperatur eller temperaturprofil over tid for et underliggende område af et fluidtilbageholdelseslag.

8. Endefitting ifølge et hvilket som helst foregående krav, hvor
afstandsringelementet (335) omfatter mindst ét sensorelement, der kan placeres mod
15 eller i umiddelbar nærhed af et underliggende fluidtilbageholdelseslag.

9. Endefitting ifølge krav 7, hvor
afstandsringelementet (335) omfatter et første sensorelement og et yderligere
sensorelement, der hvert er indrettet til at detektere bevægelse af et underliggende
20 fluidtilbageholdelseslag i respektive retvinklede justerede retninger.

10. Endefitting ifølge et hvilket som helst foregående krav, hvor
afstandsringelementet (335) omfatter en testpassage, der strækker sig fra en ekstern
testport gennem en legemsdel af afstandsringelementet, fra en radialt indvendig til en radialt
25 udvendig kantflade, til en observationsport.

11. Endefitting ifølge et hvilket som helst af de foregående krav, hvor:
afstandsringelementet (335) omfatter et ringlignende legeme med mindst én
fluidforbindelsespassage, der strækker sig mellem en udløbsport på den radialt yderste
30 kantflade af det ringlignende legeme og en indløbsport på en bagerst sideflade og/eller forrest
sideflade af det ringlignende legeme.

12. Fremgangsmåde til afslutning af fleksibelt rørlegeme ved hjælp af en endefitting ifølge krav 1, hvilken fremgangsmåde omfatter følgende trin:

under et trin med afslutning af rørlegeme aftagelig tilvejebringelse af afstandsringelementet (335) mellem endefittingens karnedel (330) og endefittingens afslutningsdel (310), hvorved hele den forreste endeflade af karnedelen holdes i et adskilt afstandsforhold fra hele den modstående bagerste endeflade af afslutningsdelen.

DRAWINGS

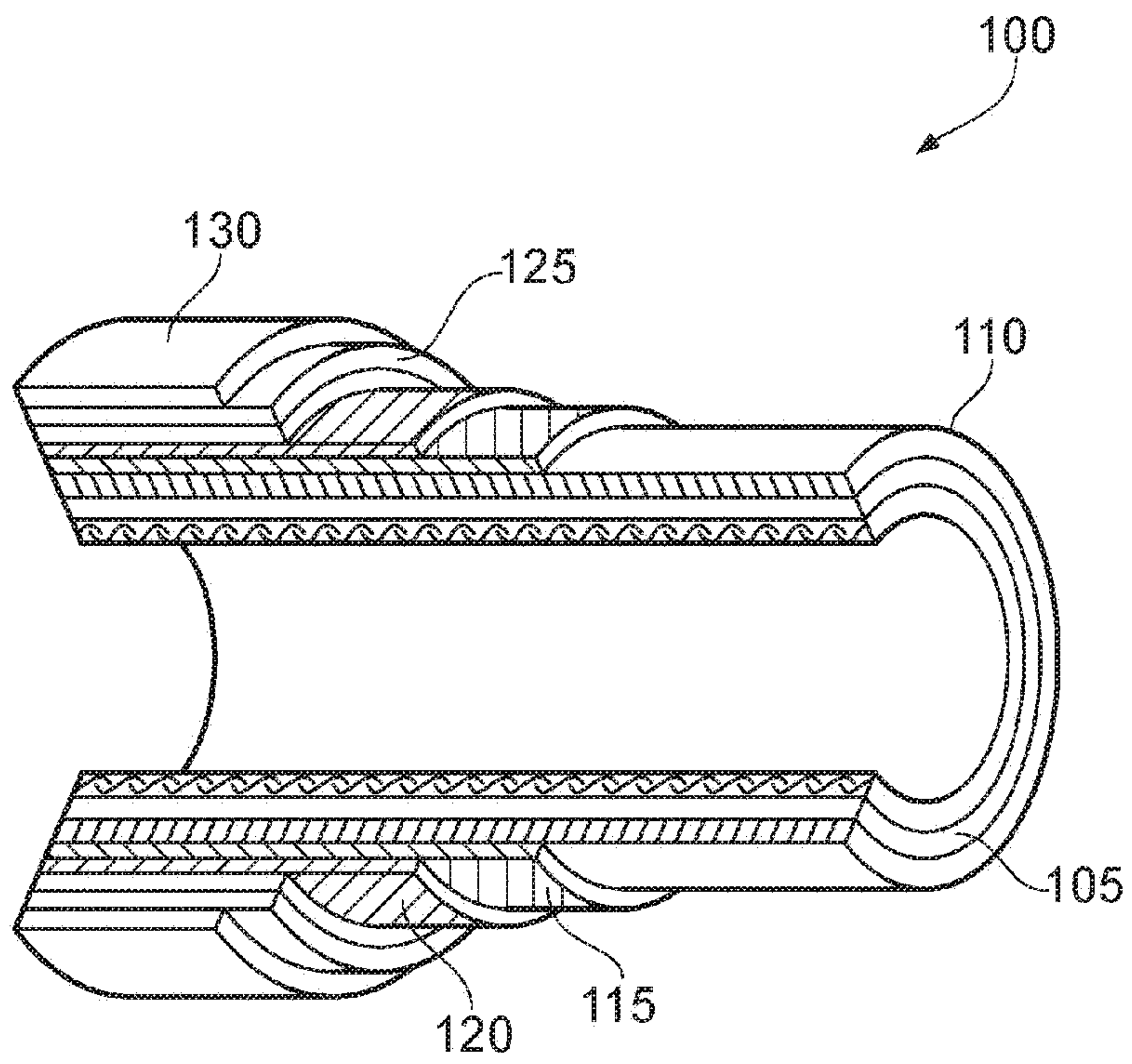


FIG. 1

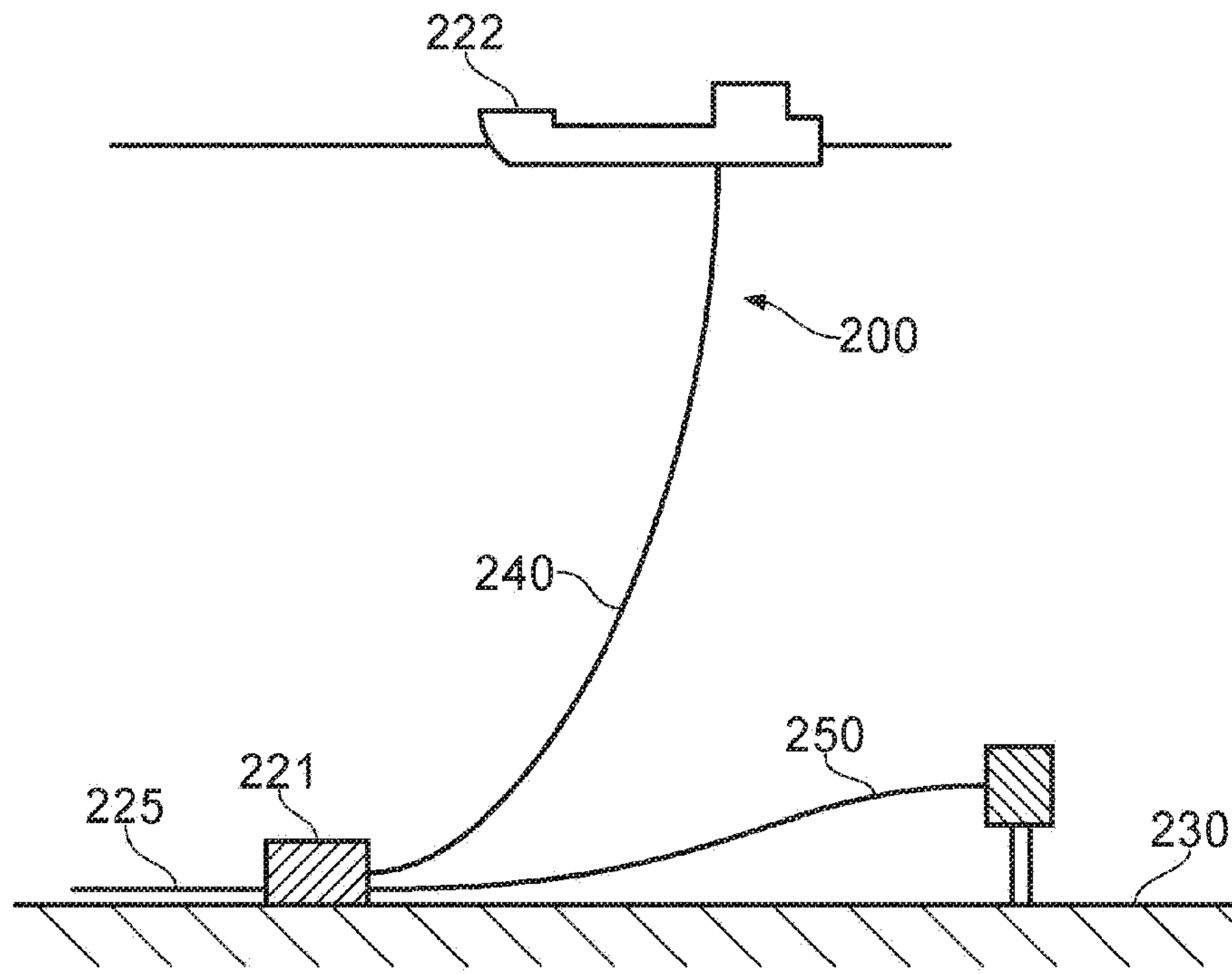
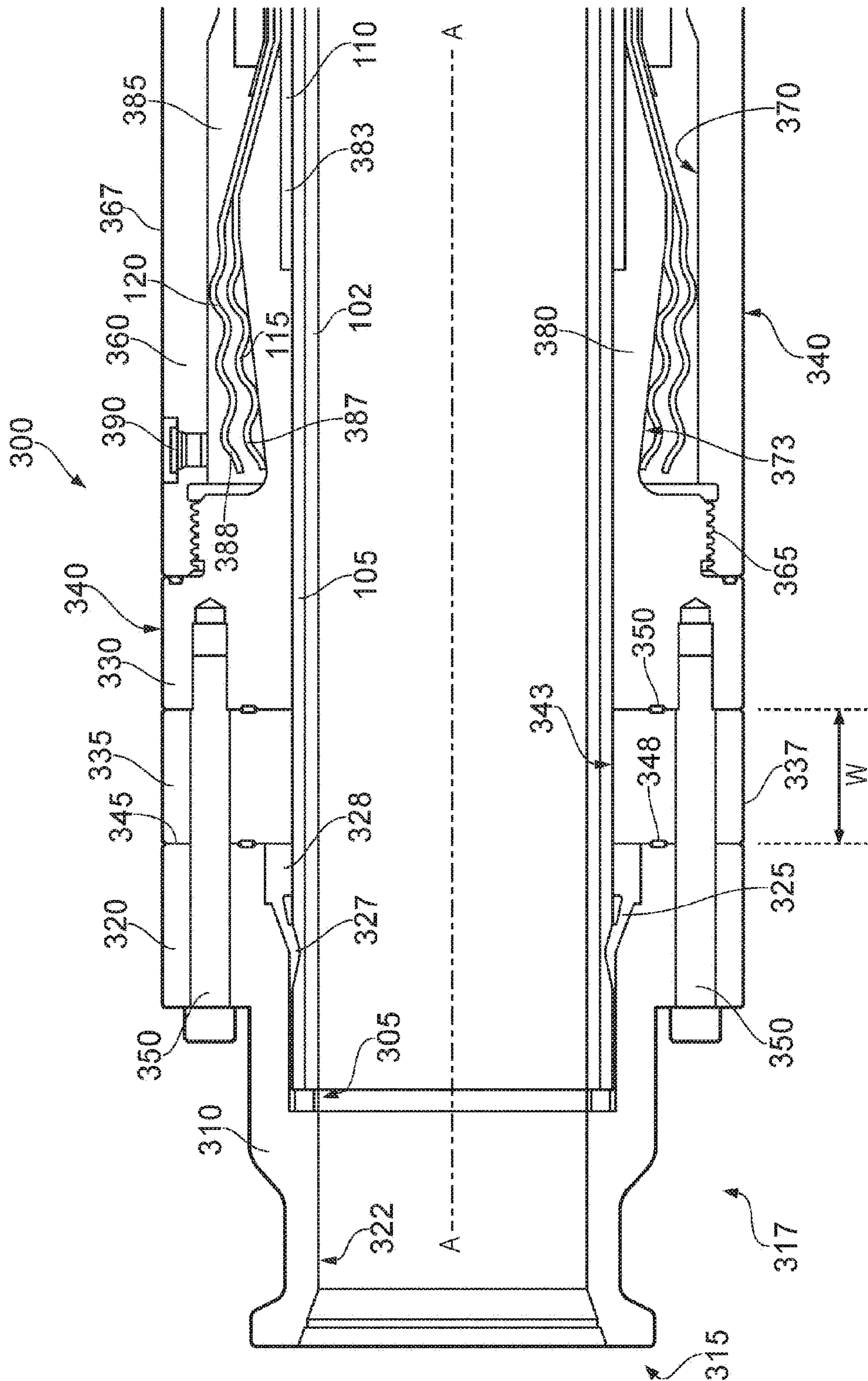


FIG. 2



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G
L

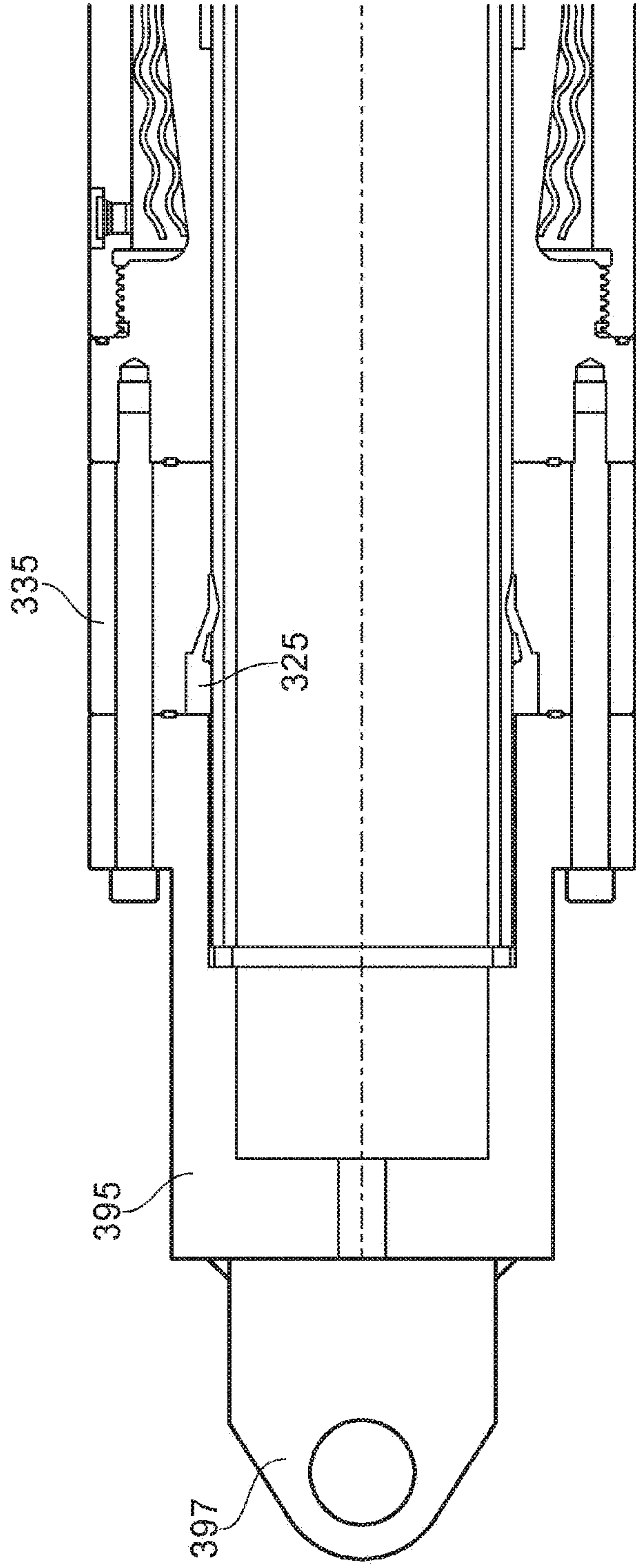
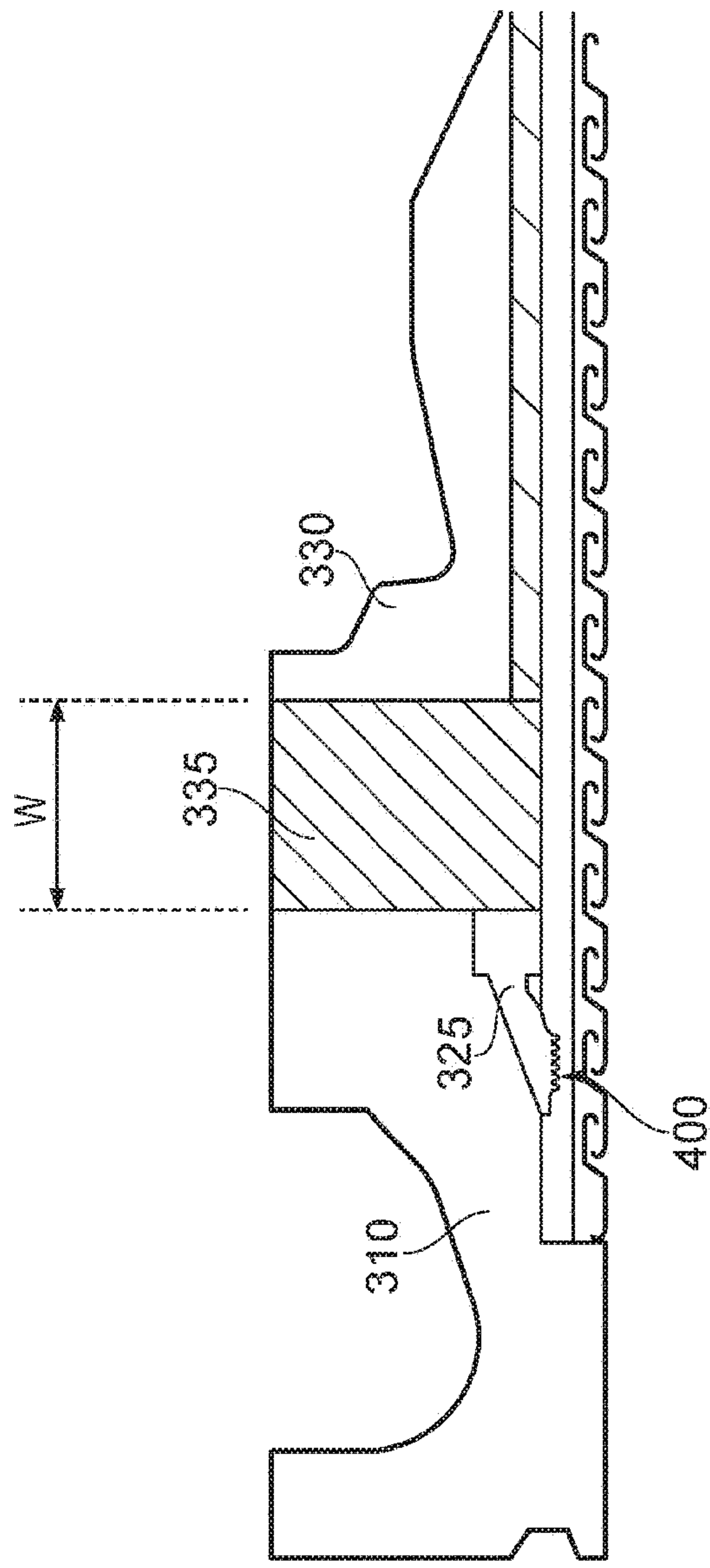


FIG. 3b



A-----A

FIG. 4

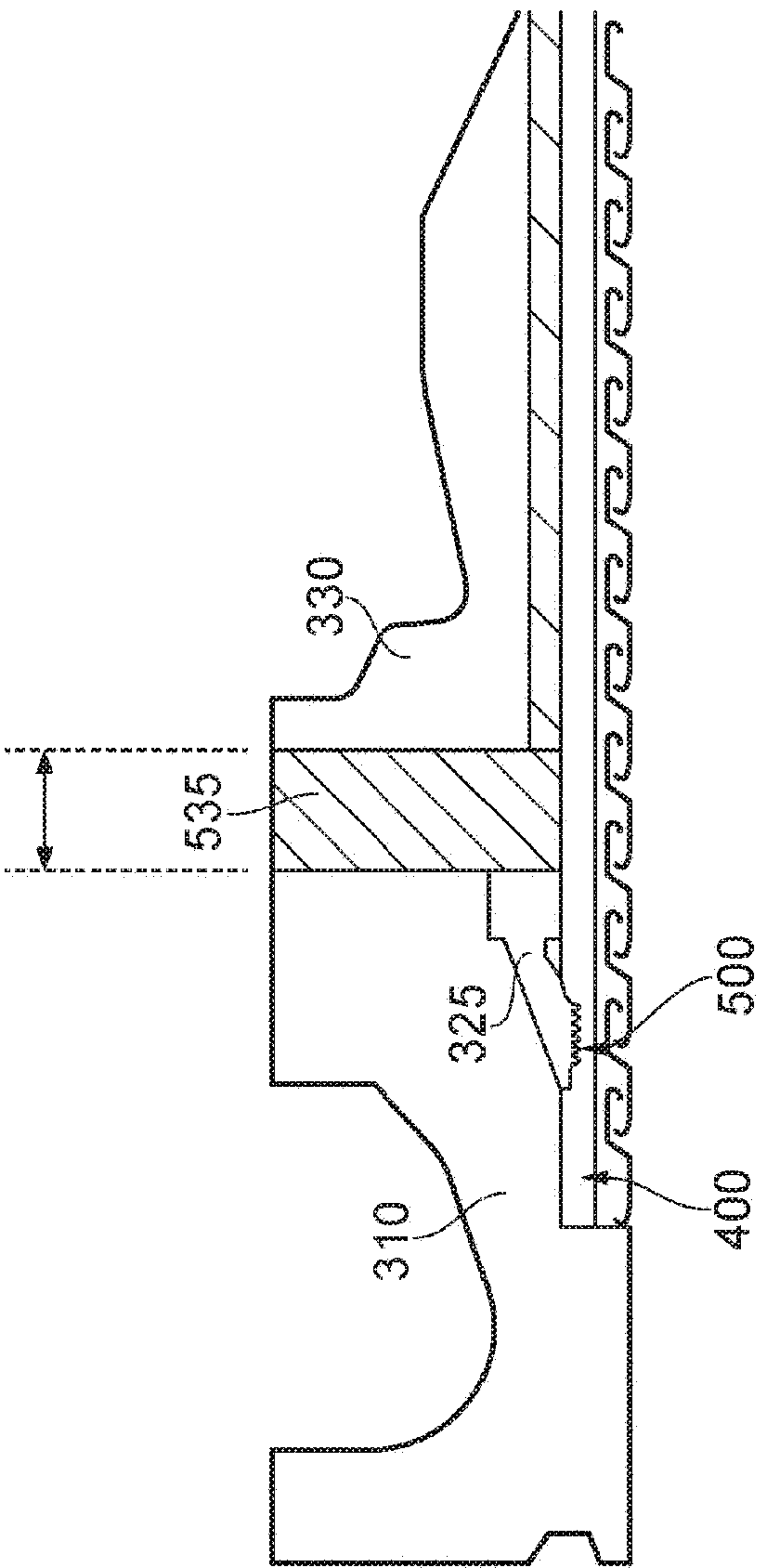


FIG. 5

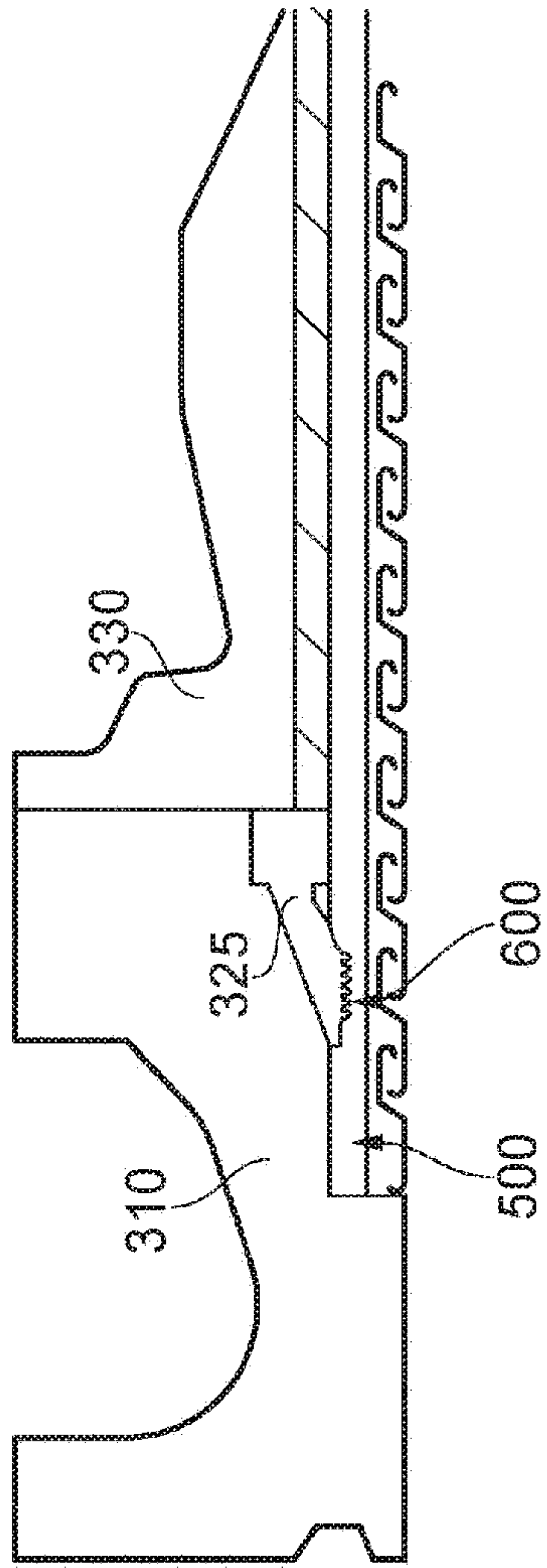


FIG. 6

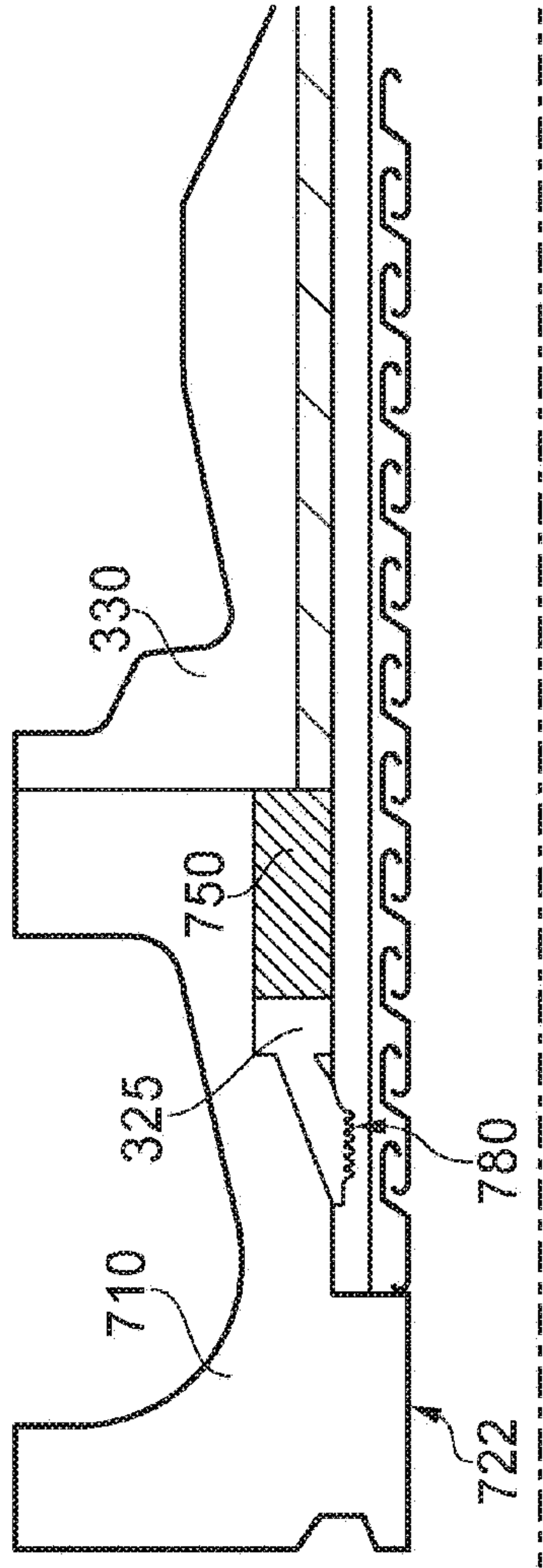


FIG. 7

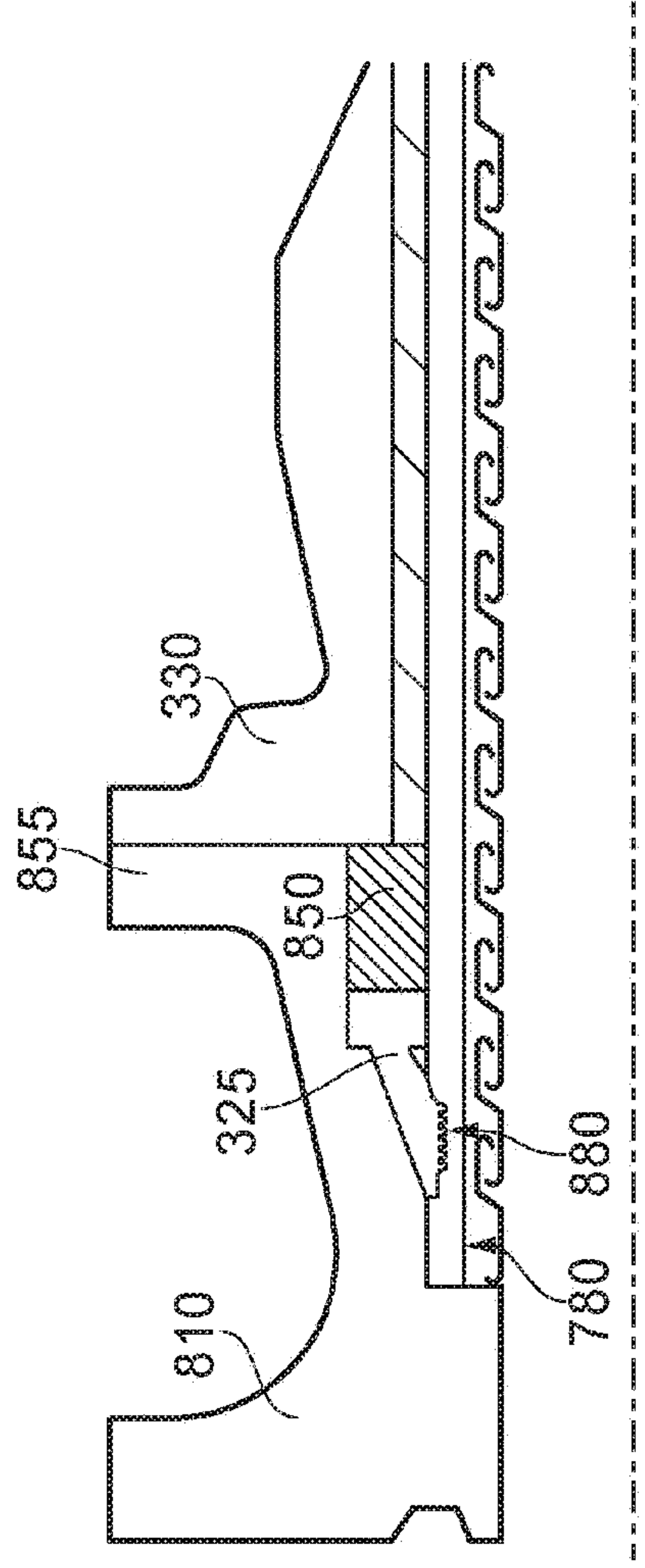
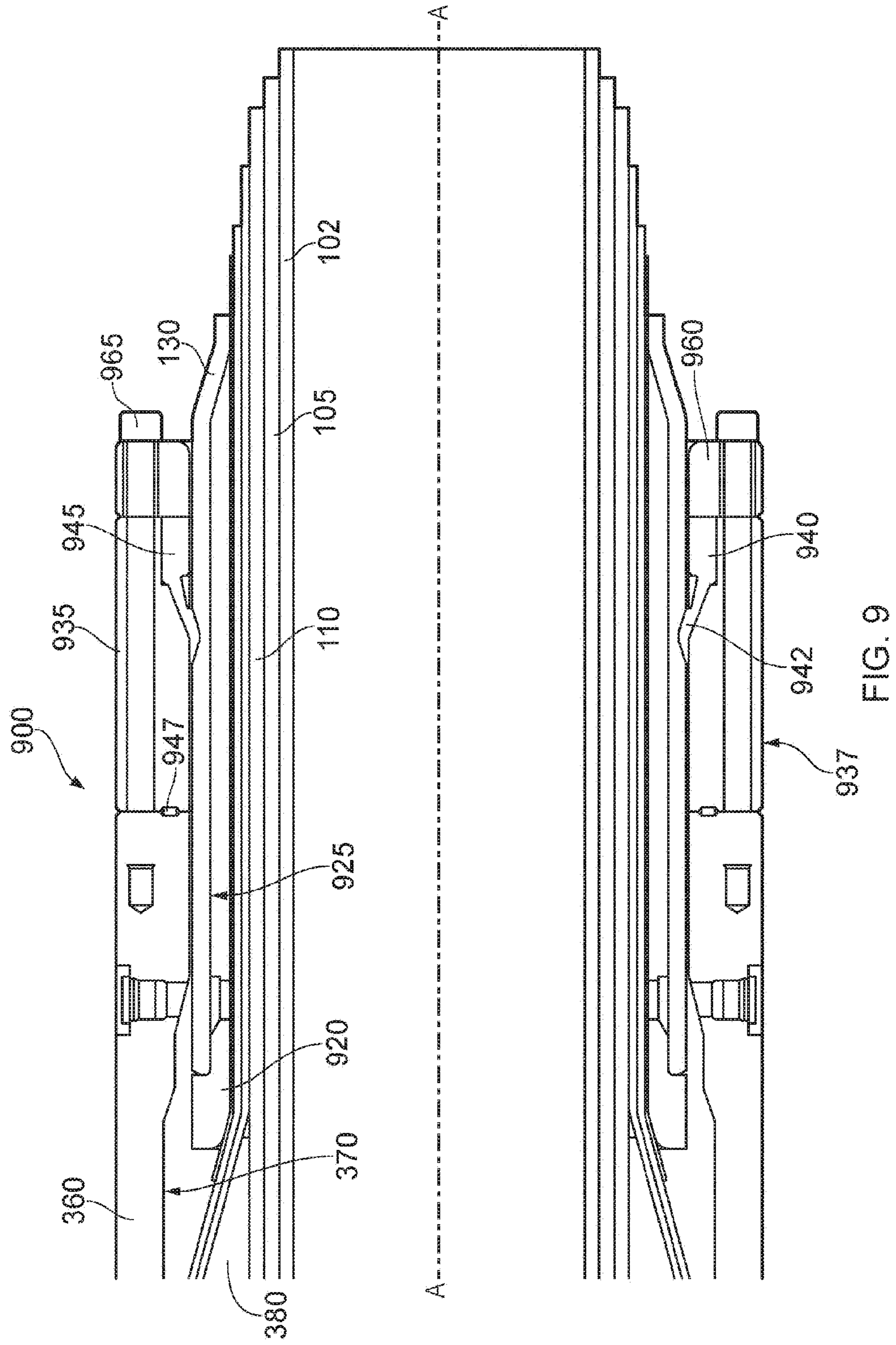


FIG. 8



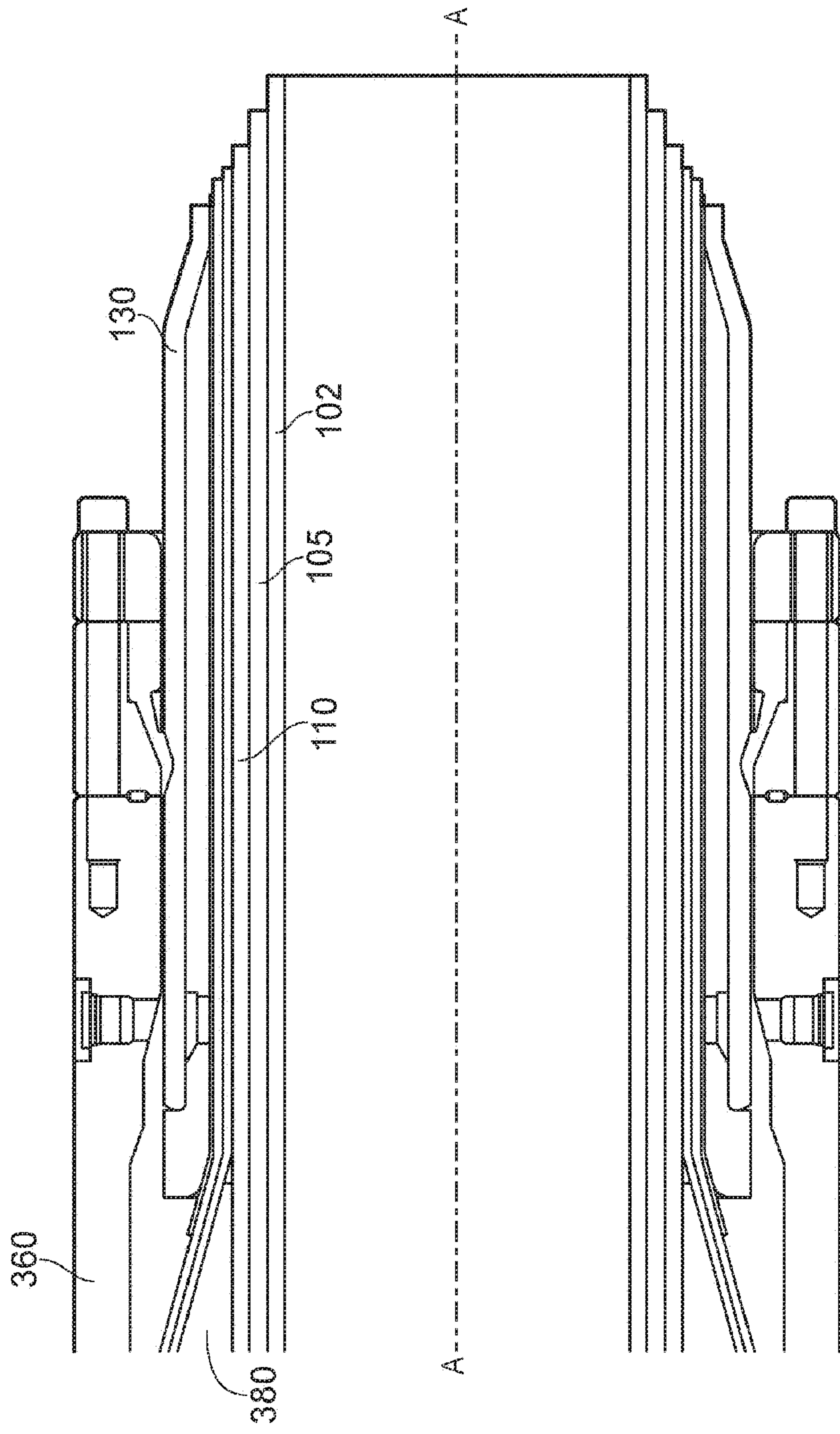


FIG. 10

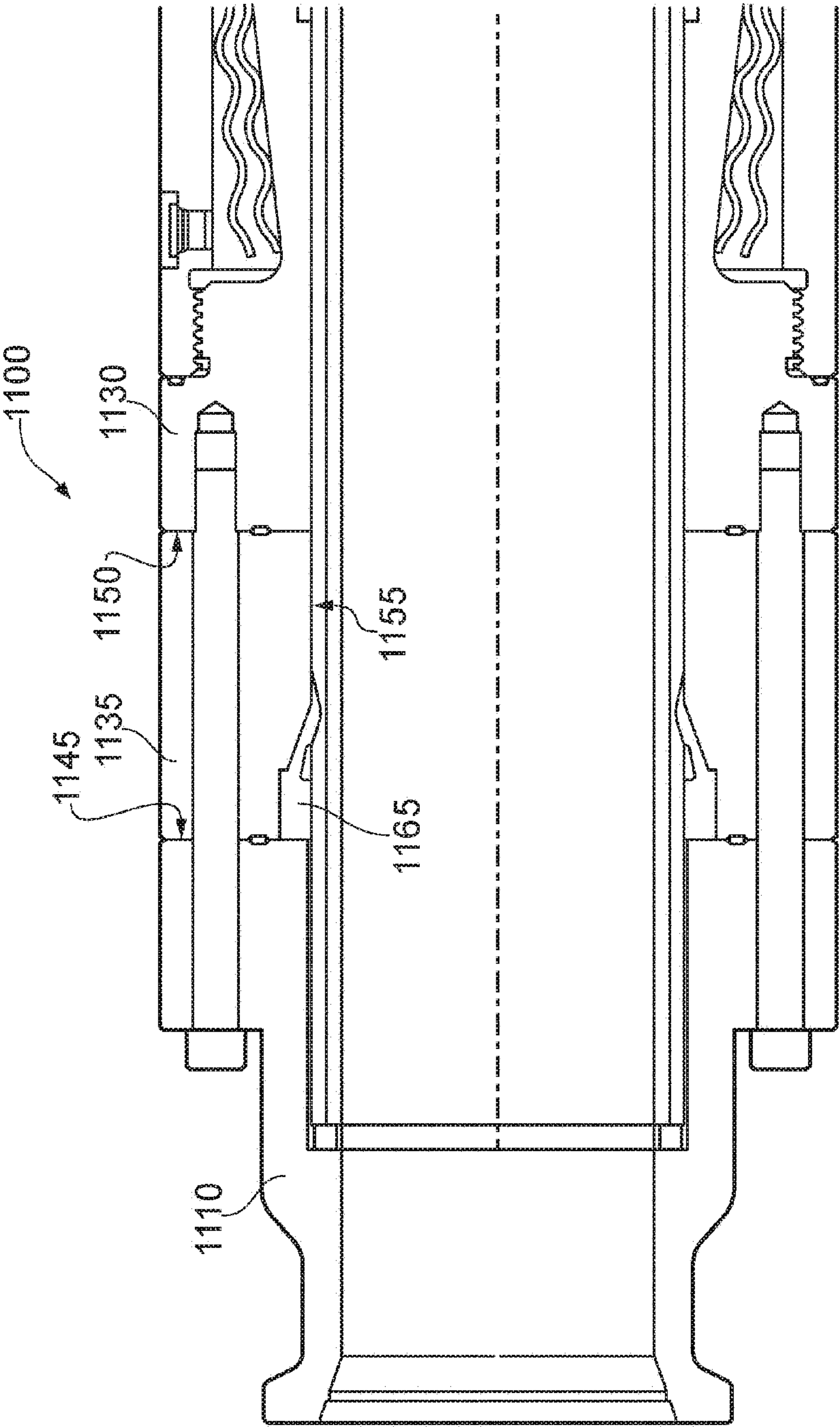


FIG. 11

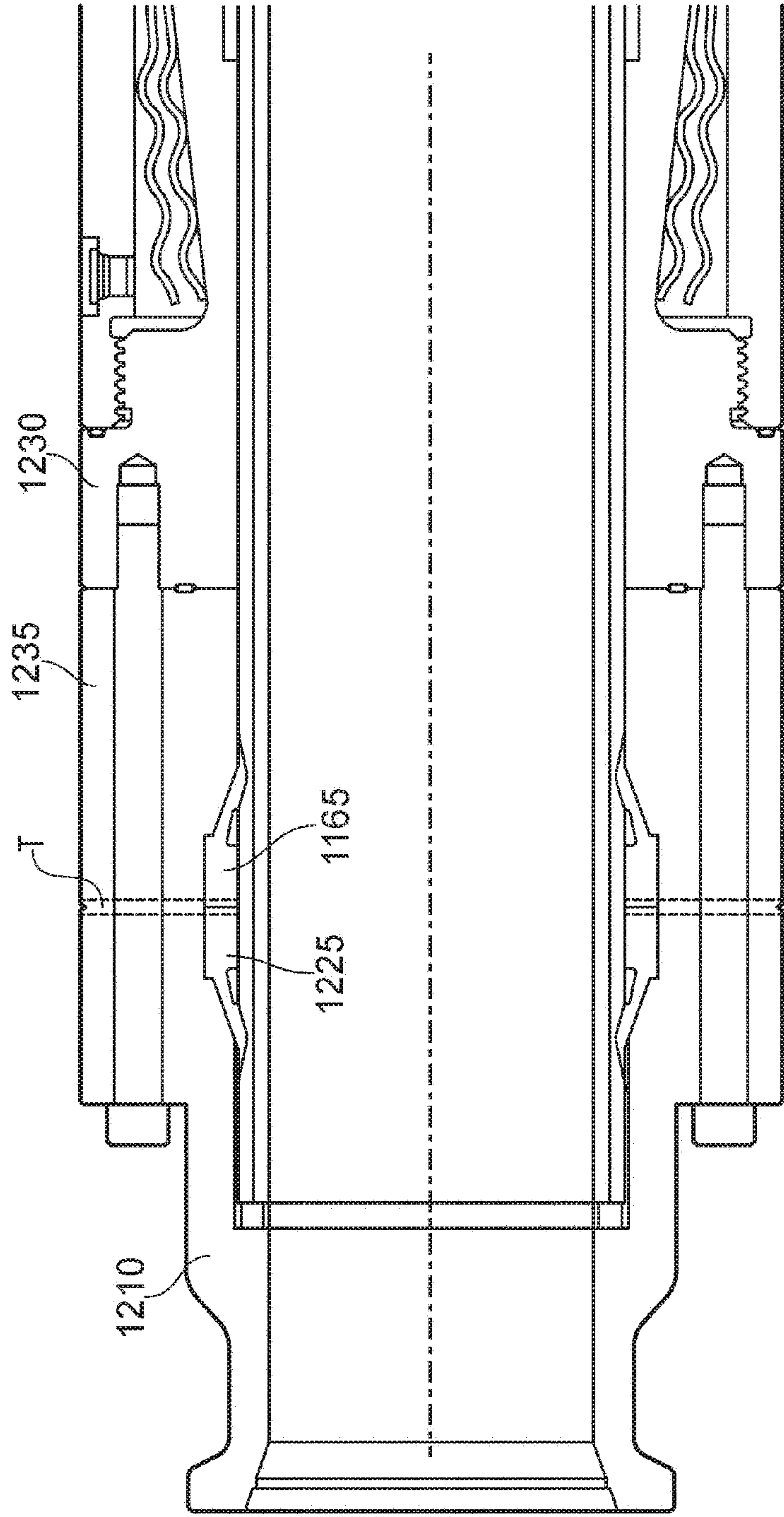


FIG. 12a

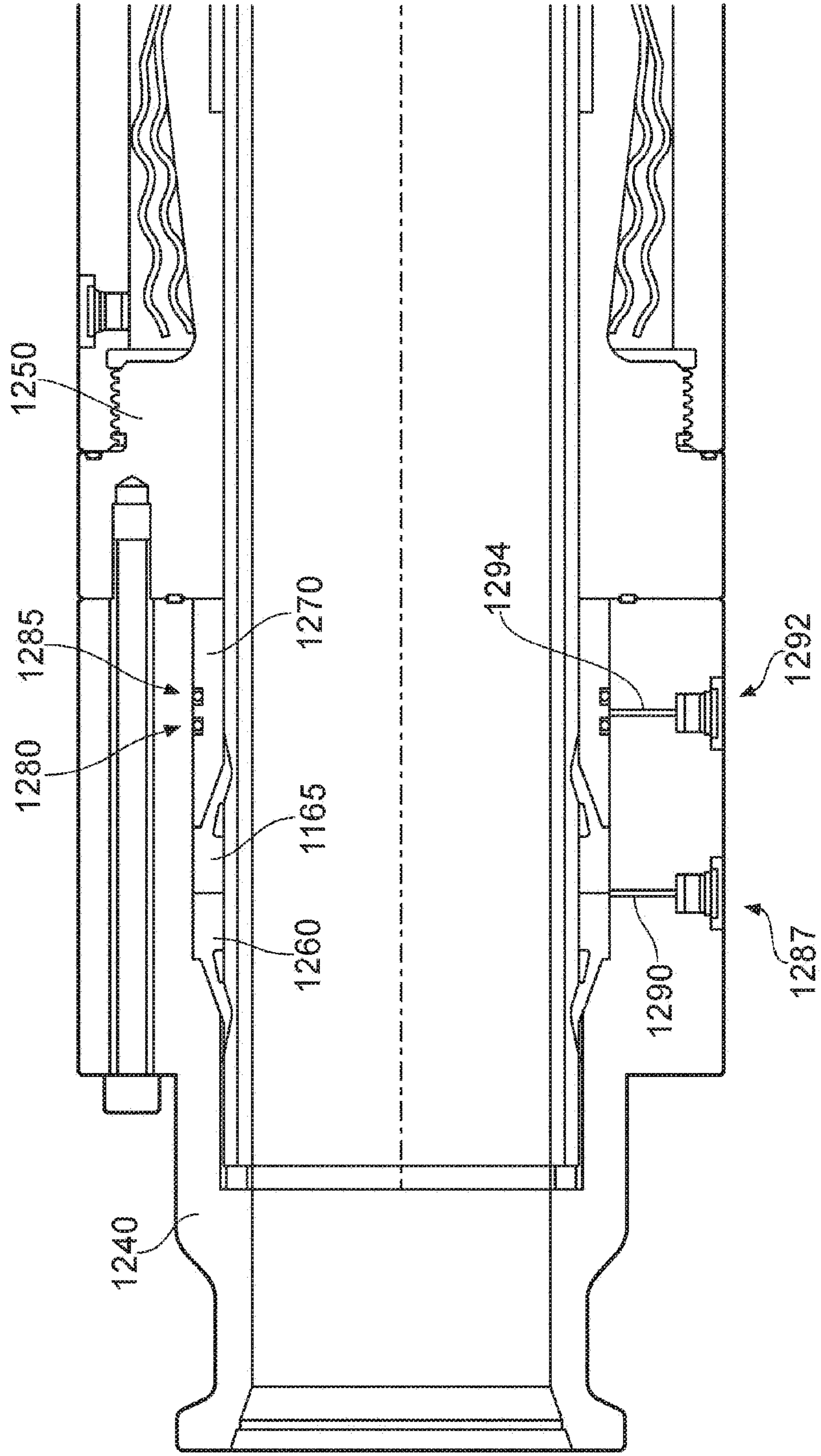


FIG. 12b

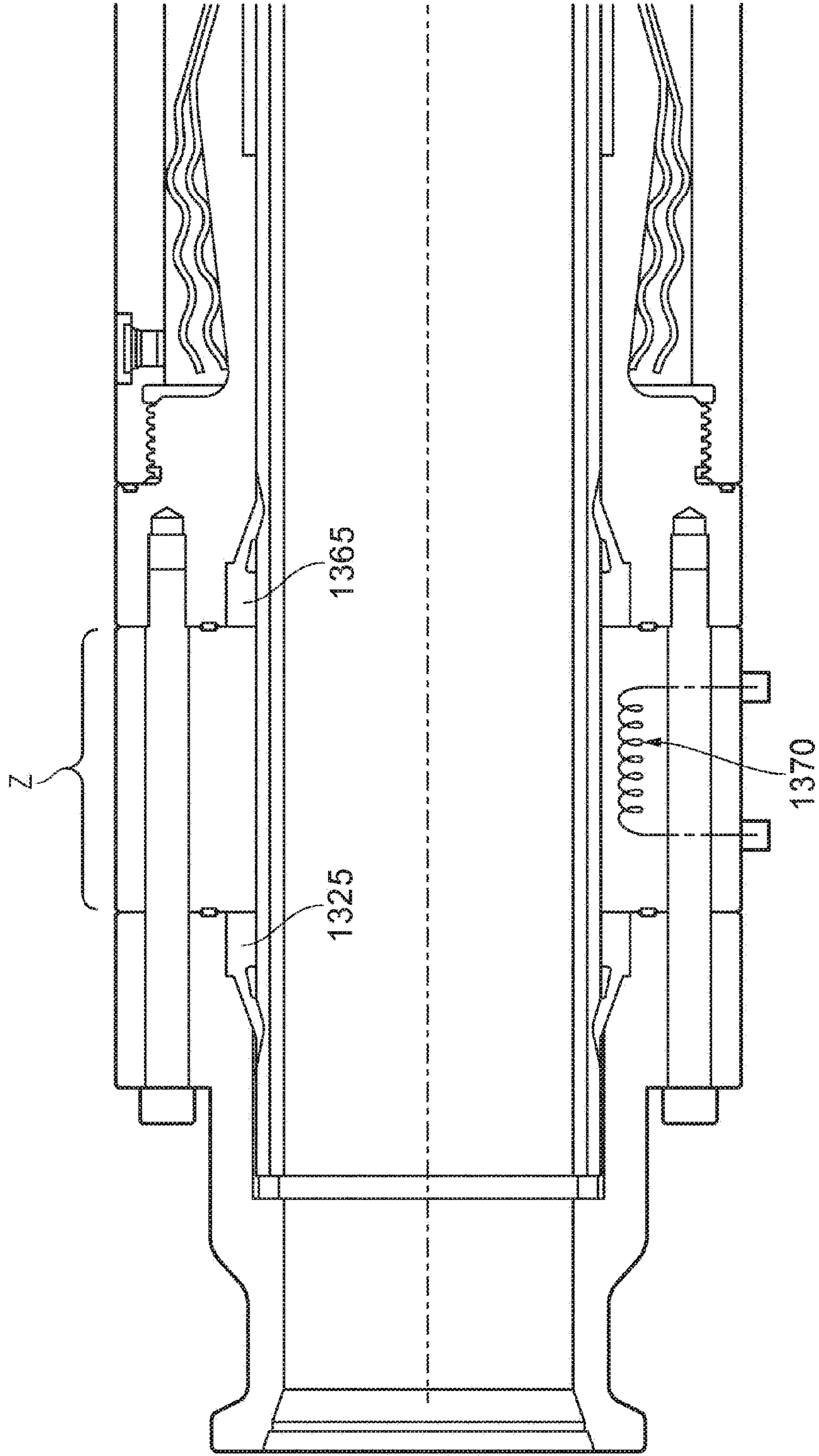


FIG. 13

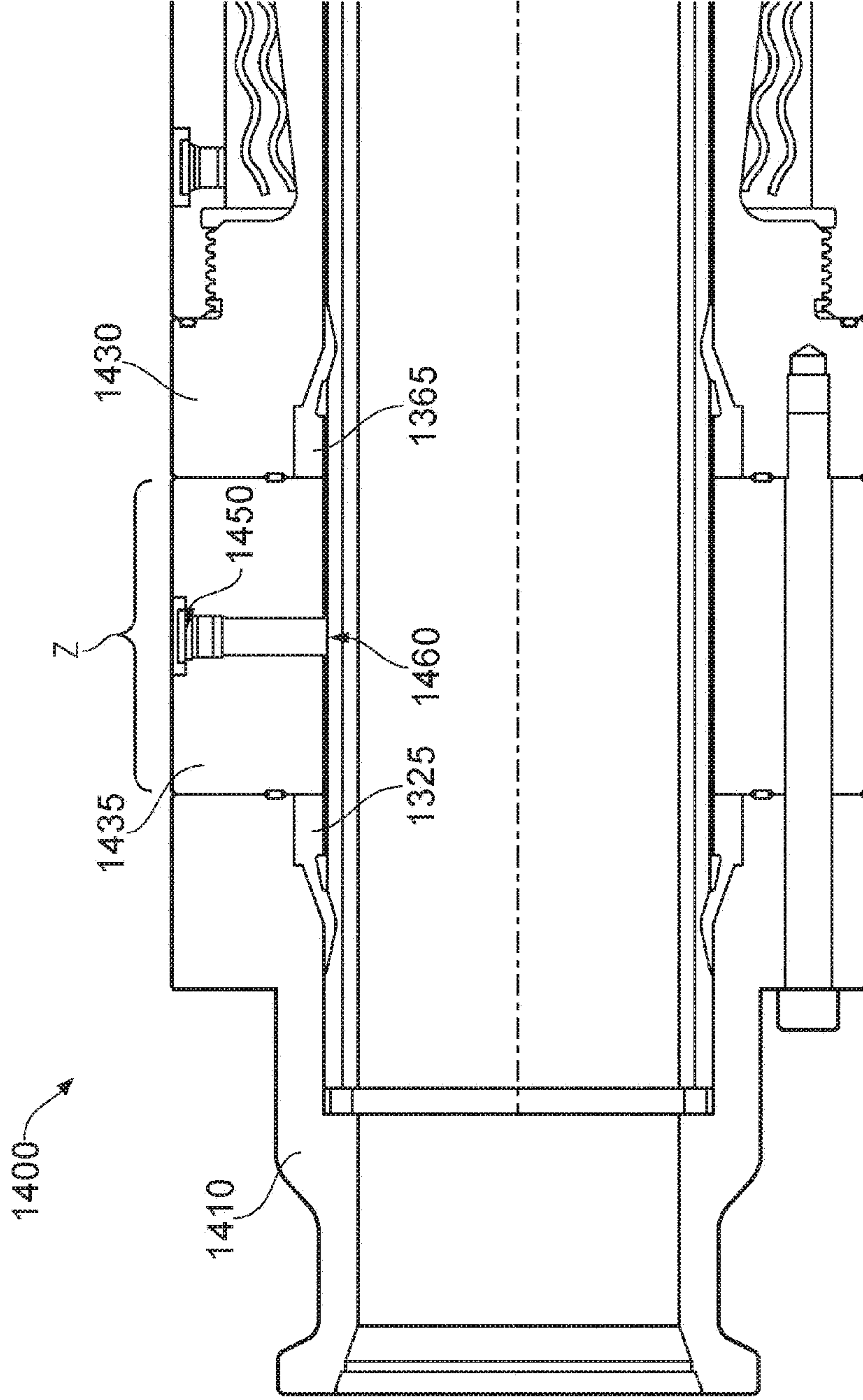


FIG. 14

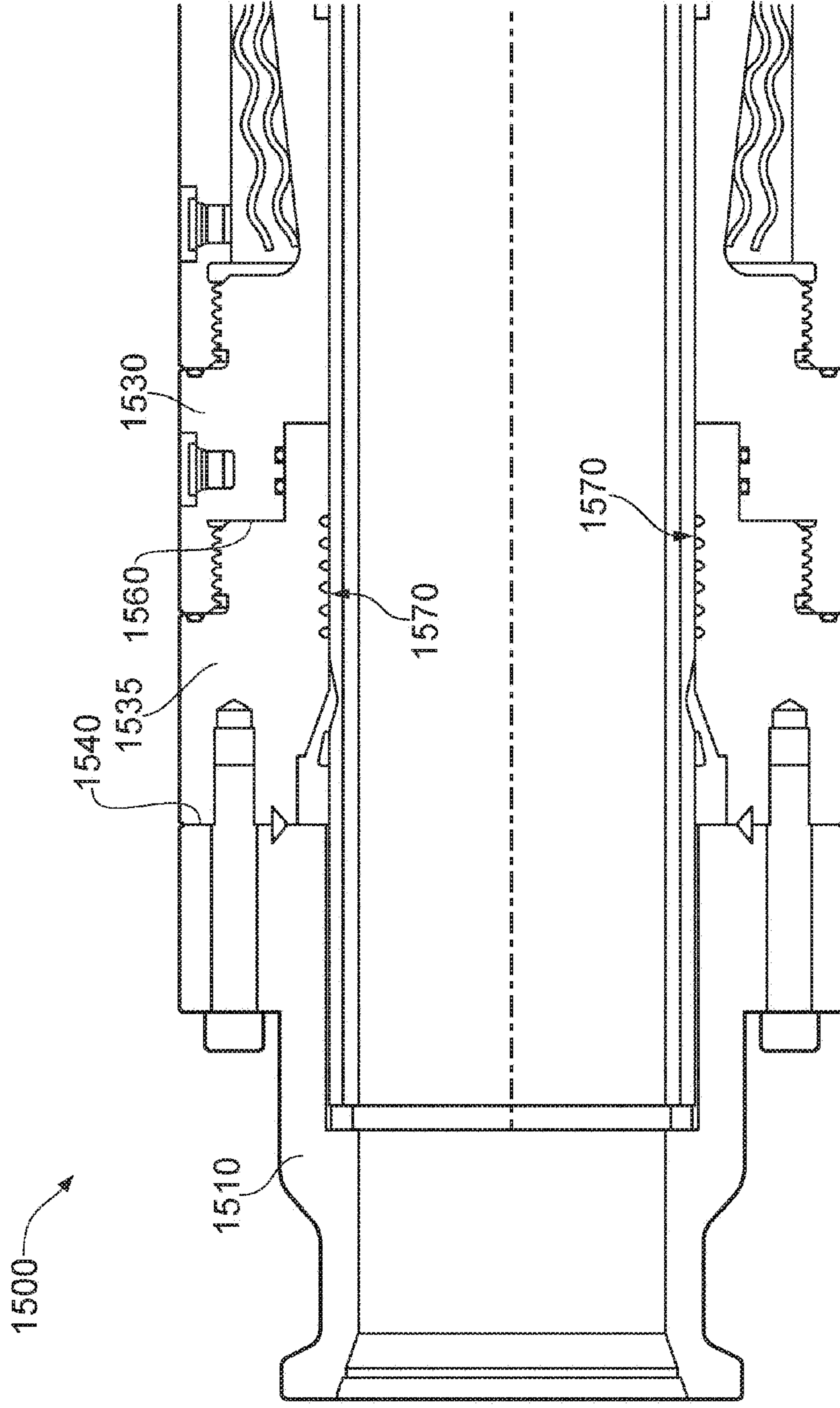


FIG. 15

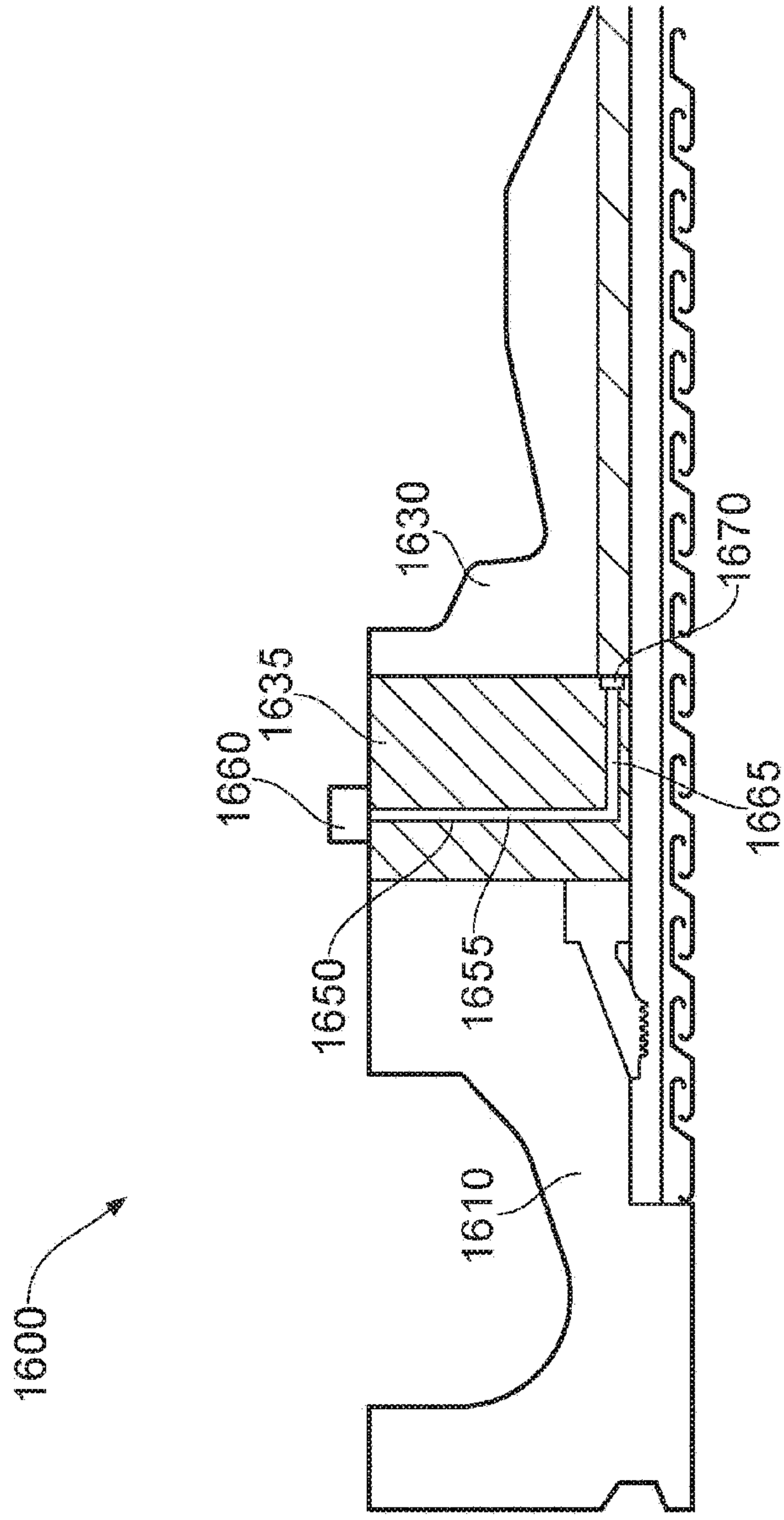


FIG. 16

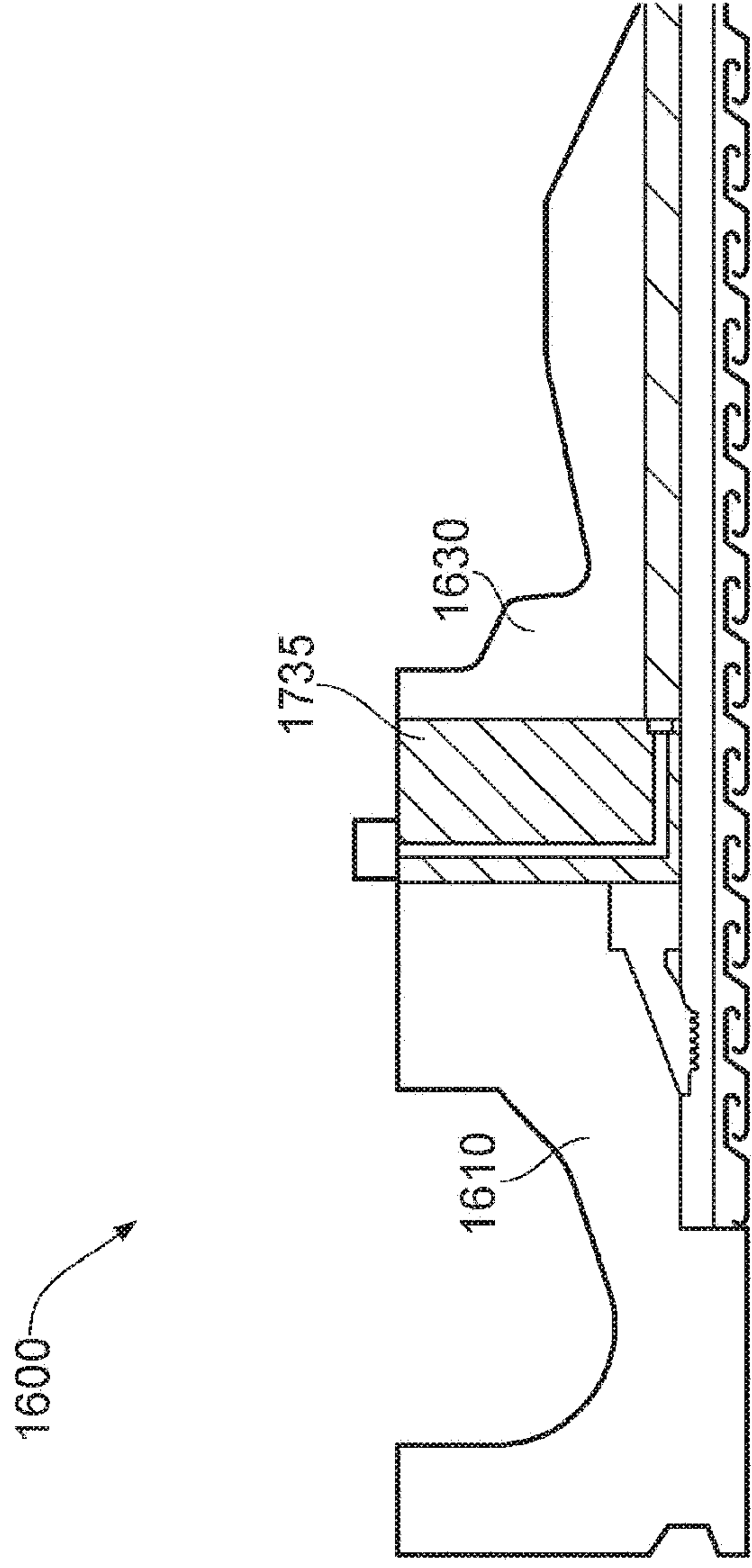


FIG. 17