# The

# Contax

# Technical Evolution

# II

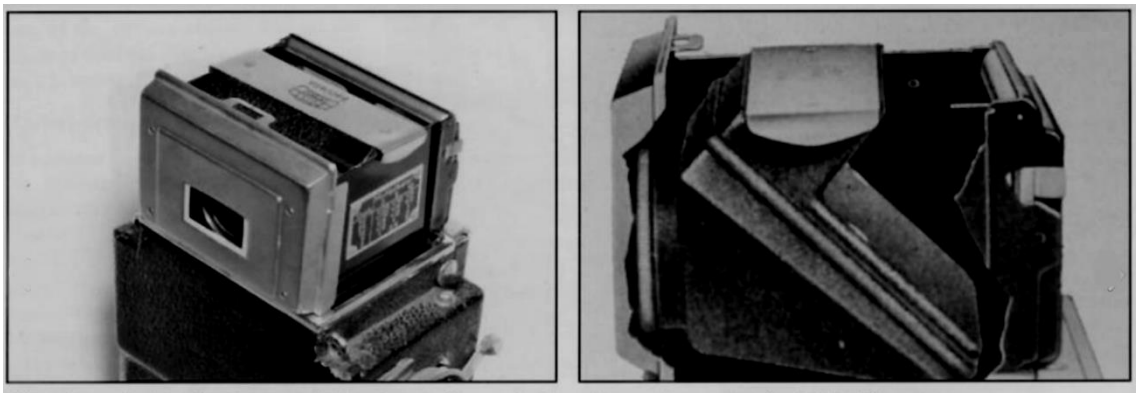
## The birth of models II and III

*Luiz Paracampo*

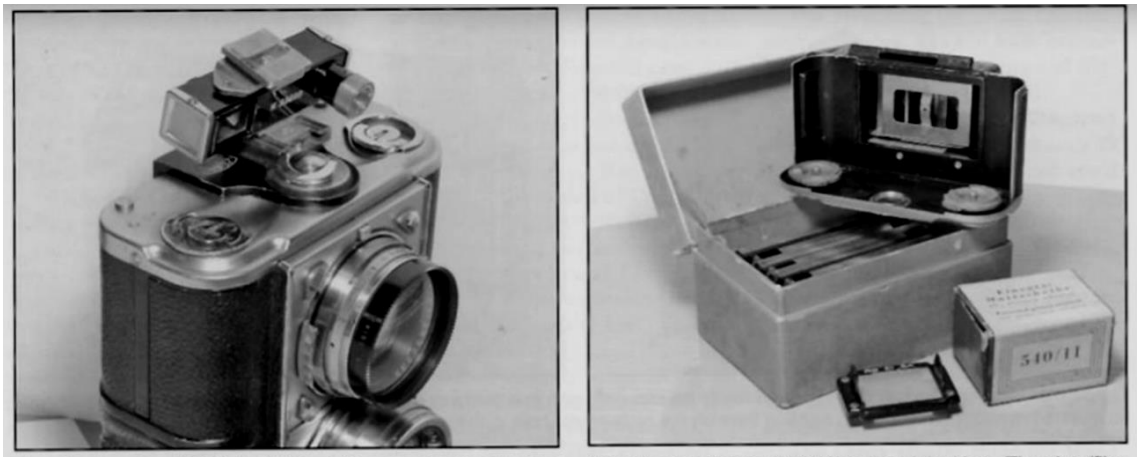
# II – The Pre – War times

**Contax family cameras were a test trail towards a single top type aimed to be the greatest technological achievement of the era. Up to then, various trials were done to feel market trends and acceptance for a product that was not known before.**

**The Contaflex was opening studies of adaptability in high level cameras. Here we show the removable pentaprism to be inserted in the camera hood, the Contamenter near focussing device and the contaflex plate holder also subsequently applied on Contax II cameras.**



**The mirror viewing device,** mounted and ready for use (left) and in a cutaway drawing (right). The user sees an inverted reversed image when sighting through the rectangular hole in the rear of the hood. Figure 10



**The Contameter (1343)** in its Contaflex adapter fixed to the bottom of the camera, which is used upside-down. Figure 13

**Plate back adapter** (860/13) in its original box. The plate/film chassis is on the box; ground-glass adapter in front. Figure 14

**Zeiss Historica**

## Evolution from model I to model II and model III

**During the Contax I life, it outwent seven commercial variations; those variations, intended to perfect the camera, led to a completely new model.**

**The Contaflex was an experimental camera intended to test a possible commercial trend different from Leicas and Contax. Super Nettels and Nettax were also a test for lower cost types. All those cameras had no much success but indicated what should be done the Contax II and the following Contax III were really successful cameras. Slight modifications were felt in all its large production years beginning in 1936 with Zeiss Ikon, Being produced ininterruptly by Carl Zeiss Jena from 1945-1950, and in Kiev under Kiev**

**trade mark with slight modifications from 1947 up to 1986 or 50 years what is a record in camera production. According to Henry Scherer there were eight variations ( 1a1, 1a2, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 1f, 1g), according with Jimmy Mc Keown's there were seven variations (1a2, 1a3, 1b, 1c. 1d, 1e, 1f) of course this does not count the prototypes and the chrome variation developed just before the beginning of production of model II.**

## Contax I variations:

**Original classification of Mead Kibey and Dr. Stanley Bishop. More details on the book of Hans-Jürgen Kuc.**


**Westlicht**

**Contax 1a1: No slow speeds view finder in the center of rangefinder 2 dimples one in rangefinder wheel other in wheel lock**


**Westlicht**

**Contax 1a2: No slow speeds view finder in the center of rangefinder 1 dimple in rangefinder wheel**


**Antique cameras**

**Contax 1a3: Same characteristics of previous models with no dimples at all**


**Mc Keown's**

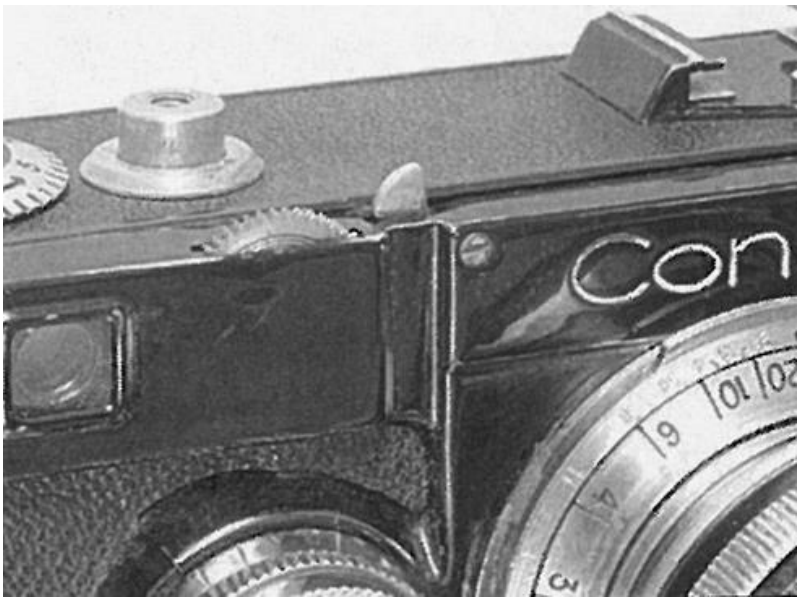
**Contax 1b: Lens bezel extends to viewing and rangefinder windows**


**Mc Keown's**

**Contax 1c Foot on tripod socket Slow speeds added bezel surrounds slow speeds setting ring**


**Mc Keown's**

**Contax 1d  Infinity focus lock around bayonet lenses other than normal maintain unlocked focusing wheel. Scale in chrome**




**Mc Keown's**

**Contax 1e: Groove in the bezel and moved viewfinder new kind of shoe machined shoe**


**Mc Keown's**

**Contax 1f: Same as previous model plus four screw in the machined shoe**


**Henry Scherer**

**Contax 1g: Henry Scherer believes the Chrome Face Contax I could be a postwar or "Jena" Contax of the most extreme rarity. Mechanically and optically it is identical to any other Contax If.**

| TYPE | 1 | 2 | NOTES |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 a1 | NO SLOW SPEEDS | TWO DIMPLES | |
| 1 a2 | NO SLOW SPEEDS | ONE DIMPLE | |
| 1 a3 | NO SLOW SPEEDS | NO DIMPLE AT ALL | |
| 1 b | SAME AS 1 a | NO DIMPLES | BEZEL EXTENDS TO VIEW AND RANGEFINDER |
| 1 c | SLOW SPEEDS ADDED | GUARD OVER SPEED DIAL | FOOT ON TRIPOD SOCKET |
| 1 d | SAME AS 1 c | INFINITY LOCK | |
| 1 e | SAME AS 1 d | INFINITY LOCK | REVERSED VIEWFINDER WINDOW EXTERNAL RANGEFINDER VIEW |
| 1 f | SAME AS 1 e | INFINITY LOCK | REVERSED VIEWFINDER WINDOW EXTERNAL RANGEFINDER VIEW PLUS FOUR SCREWS IN ACCESSORY SHOE |
| 1 g | SAME AS 1 f | SAME AS 1 f | CHROME FINISHED PARTS |

**The quality of Contax I series let us much to be desired. According to Henry Scherer. A zeiss expert of our days, attest the following:**

***-My overall conclusion is that the Contax I is, was and will always be a collectors camera and a user's nightmare. My advice is that if you haven't already bought one, and you intend to***

*obtain one, spend your money on the very best looking one you can find. Be patient, be very patient, and go for exterior cosmetics. The simple fact is that if you buy a Contax I to use, it will disappoint you just as it disappointed previous owners. All Contax I's have reliability issues related to design defects that cannot be overcome by any kind of maintenance. If you want a Contax camera to use and you want a reliable picture taker strongly consider buying a Contax II, III, IIa or IIIa model. My opinion is that Zeiss should have discontinued the Contax I line with the introduction of the Contax II.*

*According to myself who handled various Contax I, It is a bad engineered camera with several faults Inclusive putting it to the best form its mechanics is simply unreliable n all models being the last slightly more confident wth a special attention you could never have in a hurry. Much more, parts are incompatible from one model to another. All problems are around the speed change dial and film advance mechanics. Really problems of Contessa Nettel and Miroflex were increased once those cameras had no film advance mechanics because were plate cameras. Another problem was that curtains varied according to batchans could be made from steel, aluminum or brass.*


**A discussion about variations could be seen at:**
**http://ussrphoto.com/forum/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=2256**

**Lenses will be discussed in a proper segment.**

May 5, 1936. H. KÜPPENBENDER 2,040,050

COMBINED PHOTOGRAPHIC CAMERA AND DISTANCE METER

Filed May 25, 1934 3 Sheets-Sheet 1

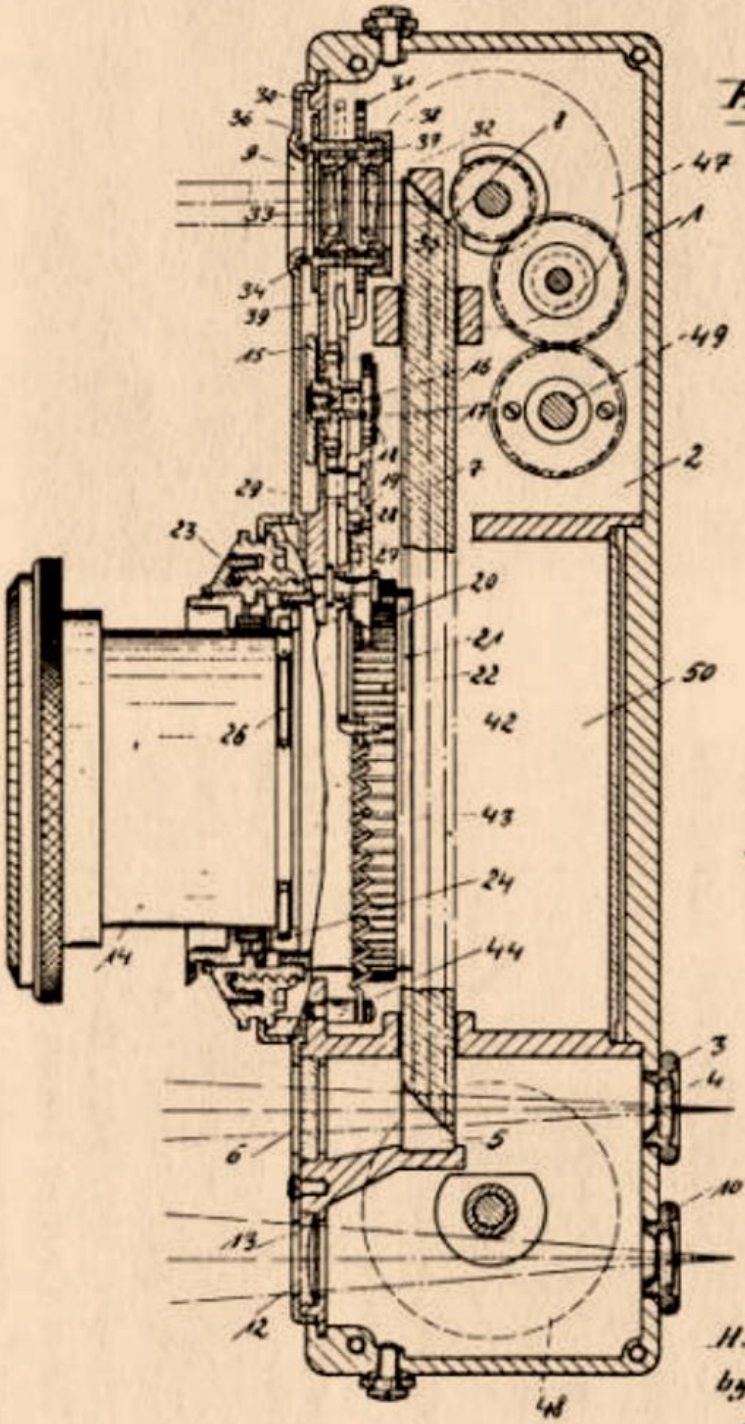


Fig. 1

Inventor:
H. Küppenbender
by: Glenn Federick
Attorney.

May 5, 1936. H. KÜPPENBENDER 2,040,050

COMBINED PHOTOGRAPHIC CAMERA AND DISTANCE METER

Filed May 25, 1934 3 Sheets-Sheet 2

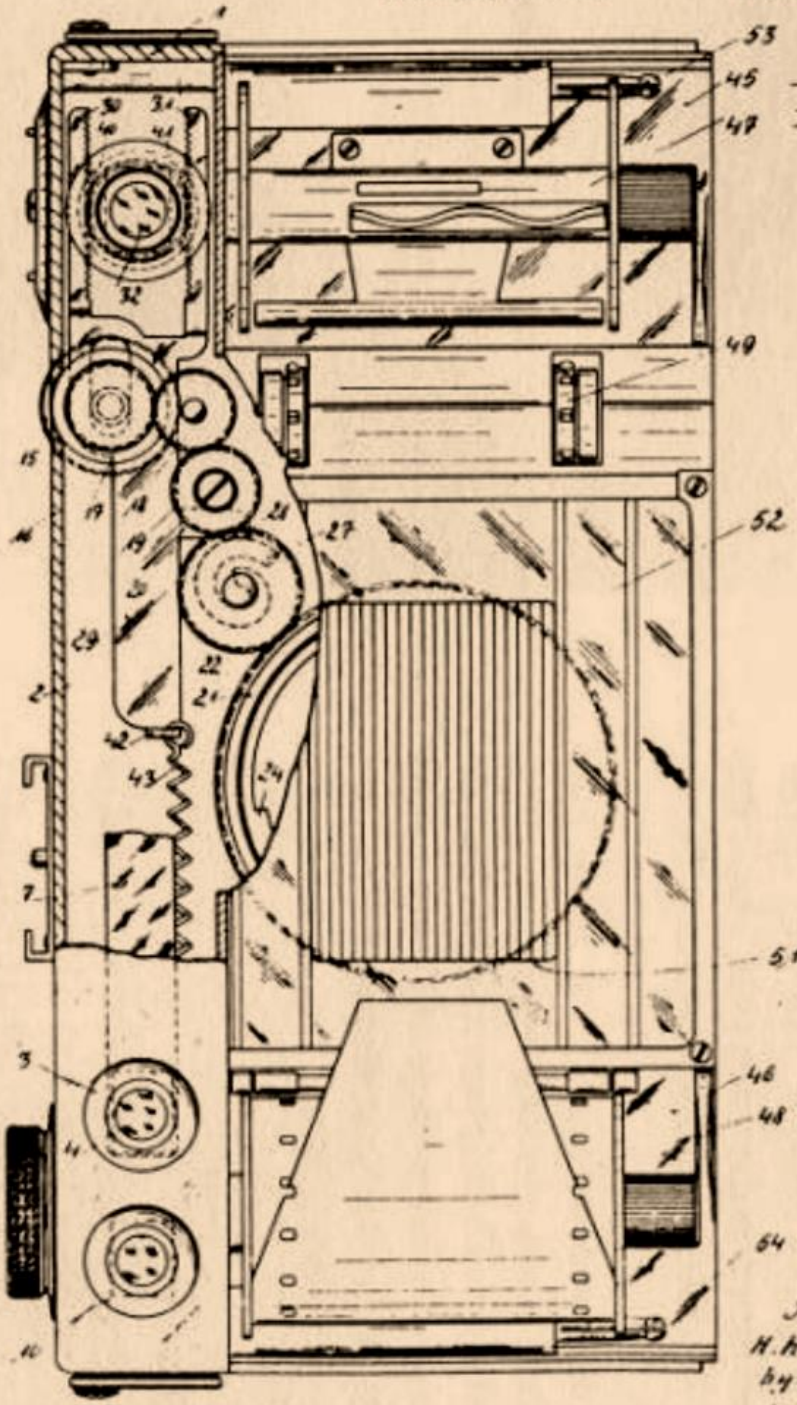



Fig. 2

Inventor
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by
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May 5, 1936. H. KÜPPENBENDER 2,040,050

COMBINED PHOTOGRAPHIC CAMERA AND DISTANCE METER

Filed May 25, 1934 3 Sheets-Sheet 3

Fig. 3

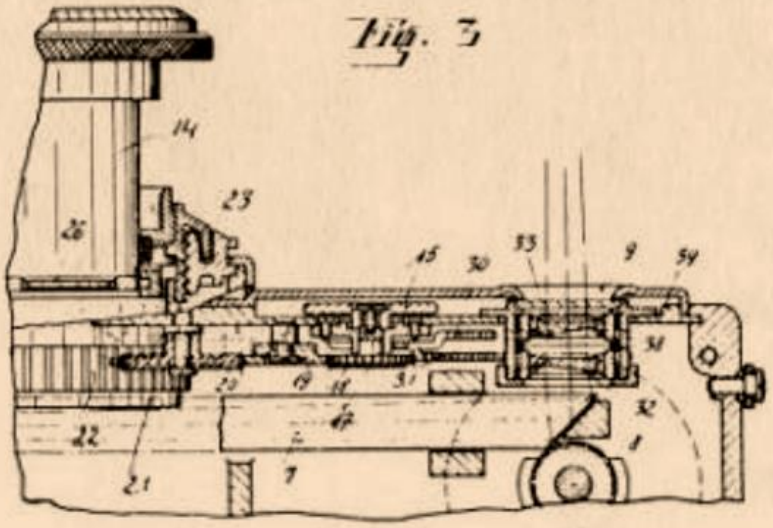
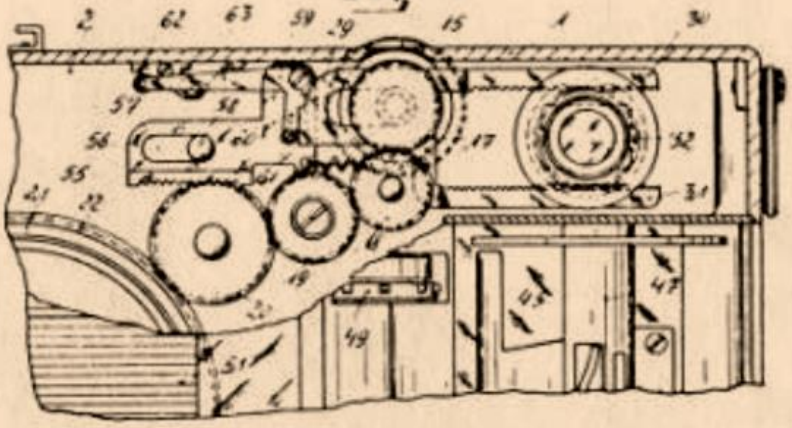


Fig. 4



Inventor
H. Küppenbender
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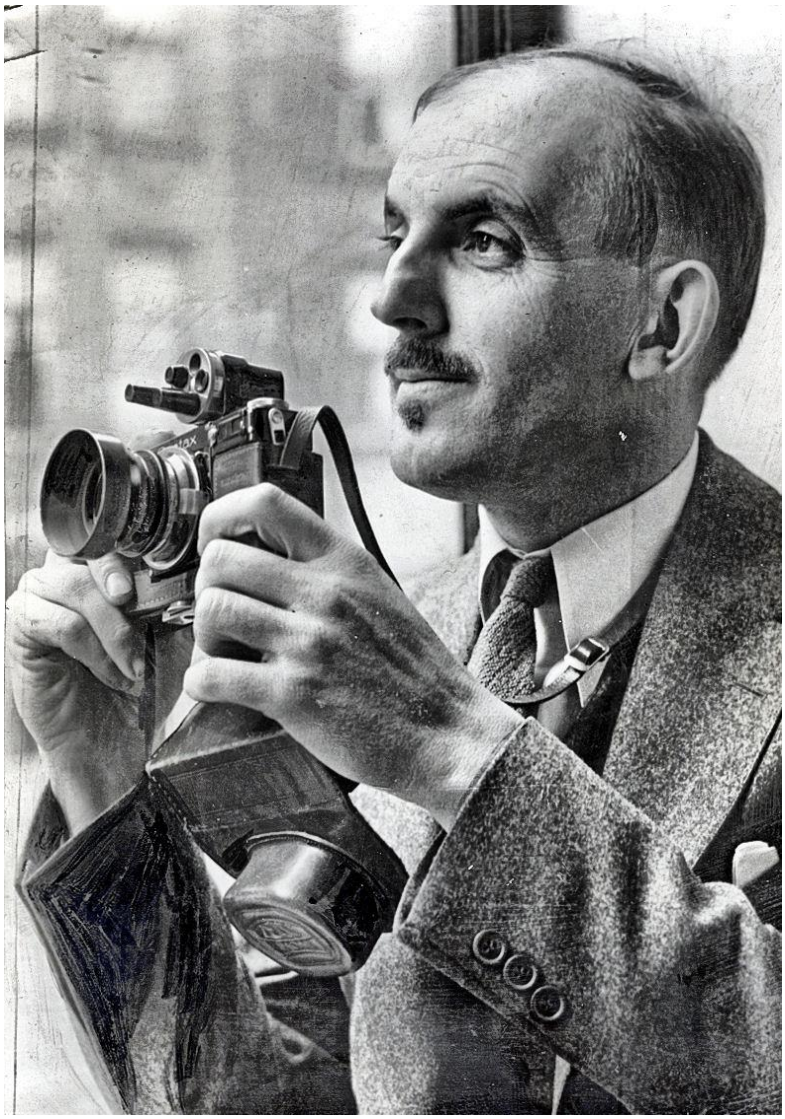
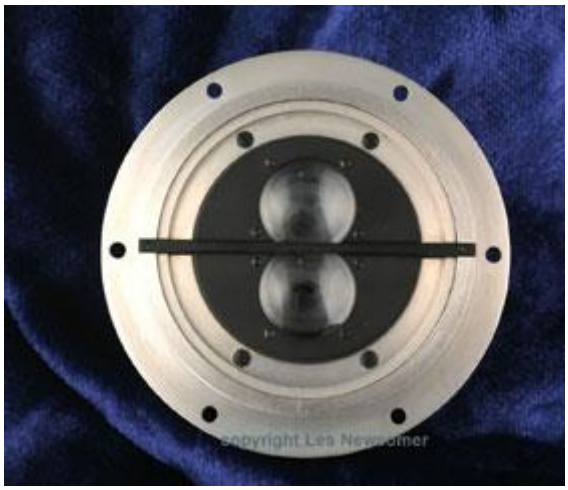
Attorney



**This is a picture of the great photographer Ansel Adams when a young man holding his Contax I. You'll notice he had great taste in lenses because mounted on it is the 4.25cm Biotar lens. A pair of these lenses with cat's eye diaphragm and added prisms was used in the Zeiss Stereo Camera that filmed 1936 Berlin's Olympic Games.**

# III -1936 Contax II and 1937 Contax III

**The Contax II was the final and decisive camera made by Zeiss Ikon in the pre-war years. It was first released in 1936 and was the successor of the Contax I. It was the first camera with a combined rangefinder and viewfinder in a single window and the most successful of all ZI cameras. It was procuced in Dresden, In Jena, There were bodies modified in Stuttgart and finally produced in Kiev uninterruptedly during 50 years with slight modifications. Its chief designer was Hubert Nerwin.**

**The Contax II was a kind of response to the market popularity and demand for the Leicas. So has done Kodak reshaping its Pupille for 127 into a Retina 35mm camera. Kodak invented a new cartridge for the 35mm film that could be useds on both Leicas and Contaxes, and of course Retinas. This demand for high quality 35mm picture taking cameras was based on the small size of cameras and the availability of 35mm motion picture film, which could be loaded by the amateur as well as professional photographers. The Contax II became the 'top class' camera among the professional. Being used by great professionals of the era.**

**Zeiss lenses were far superior to Leica due the developed triplet formulas with a minimum of ais-glass surfaces in times when coatings still was inexistent, by this same reason Zeiss produced several "aftermarket" lenses for Leica which were successfully used by military at WWII.**

**The advent of the model II was a result from the reliability failure found on Contax I, so it was needed a winner. The success and affordability of Contax II, determined the demise of all "Contax Family" cameras, being by 1039, the two only models II and III then produced.**

**Experiences on Contaflex camera lead to built a new version with exposure meterso was born the Contax III in the following year.**

**After being the professional workhorse of several photographers, after the war was felt a decline due manufacturing difficulties and the advent of the Leica M3 which captured the better of both worlds.**

**The new Contaxes from Sttutgart brought nothing new beyond the external shape and less weight, but Leicas M offered a better reliability.**

**.**


**Above: Contax II Sonnar 2/5cm collapsible: Down: Contax III Sonnar 1.5/5cm**

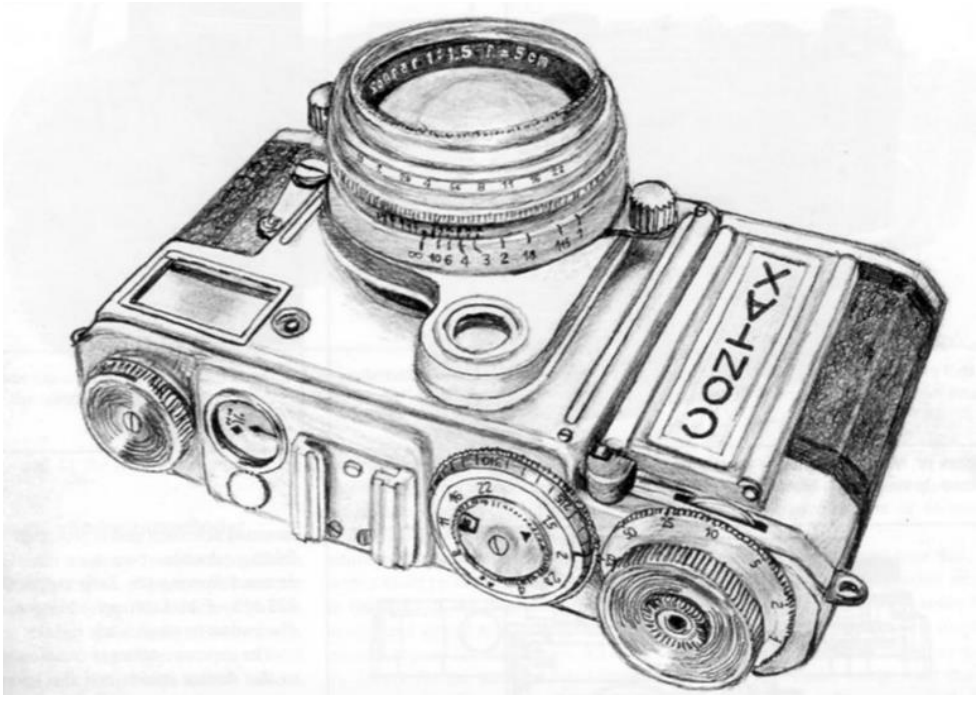

**The Contax II and III were intended for the professional market, and the firsts to introduce the built-in self timer. The III was the first professional 35mm camera with a built in meter, borrowed from Contaflex TLR.**

**Early Photography**

**Triotar 4/8,5cm Sonnar 4 13,5cm Tele-Tessar K 5.3/18cm Orthometar 4,5/3,5cm**

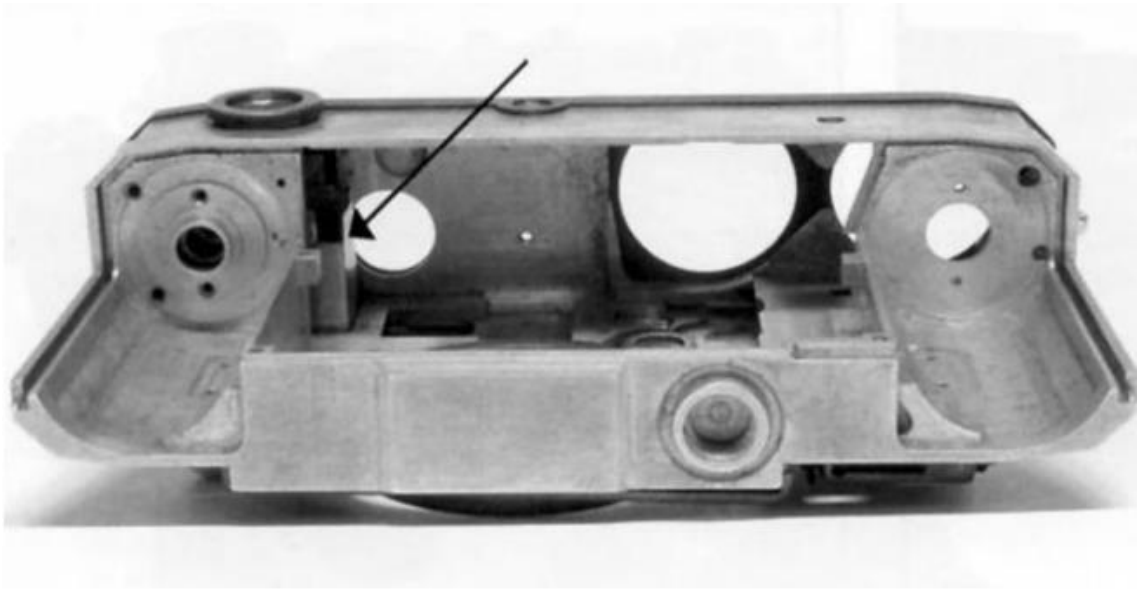
## Contax IV

**The commercial success of the Contaxes II and III encouraged engeneers for a new better and higher scope model. The model IV**

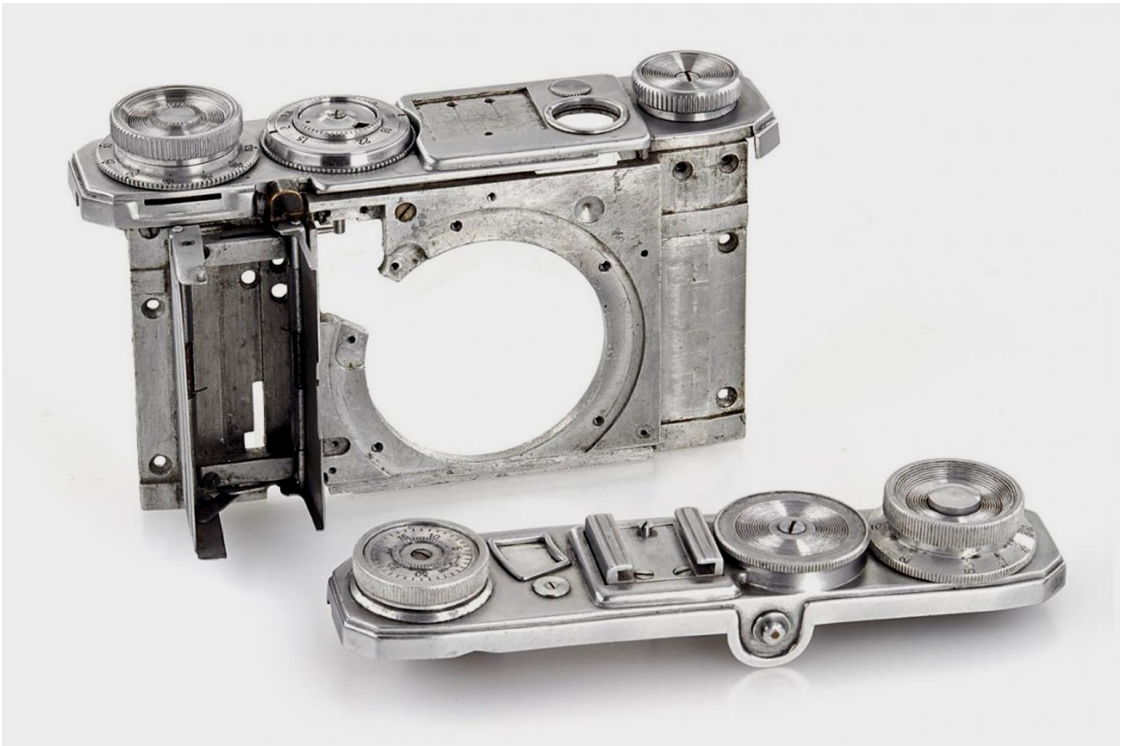


**Top class of the technical researches the Contax IV was a simbiosis of the Contax II with the lower priced Nettax. Several new solutions were employed on the camera.**


**The rangefinder was fixed and had no móbile parts. Each lens carried its own rotating wedges successful used in Super Ikonta, Nettels and Nettax cameras but instead of a rigid periscope type prism, yet used on these commercial models it employed the double pentaprism rangefinder successful used years later on Leningrad cameras and in the second versions of Werra Family. (see the arrow in the picture)**



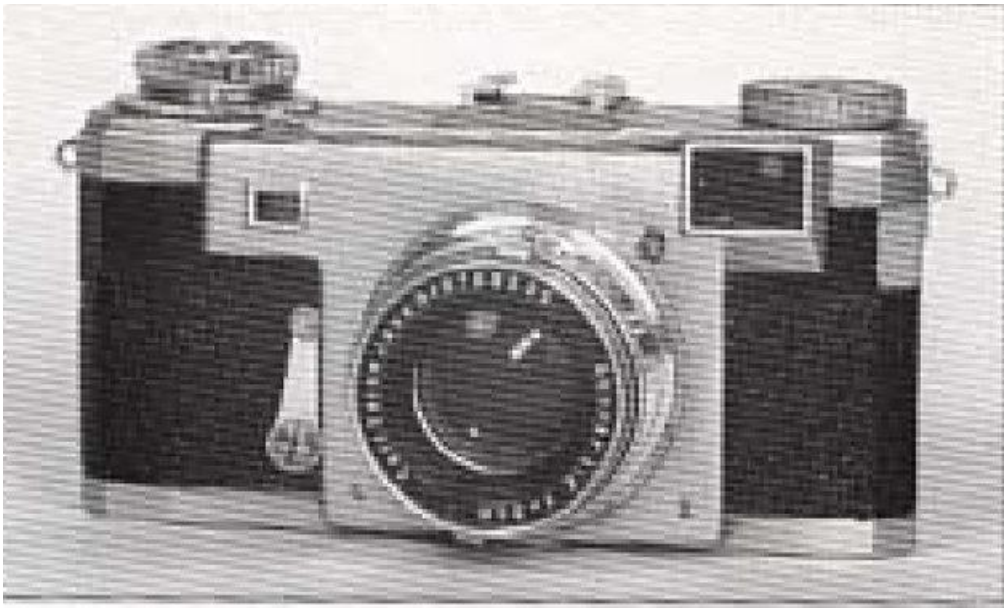
**Mechanical parts for supporting optics can be seen in the following  picture. Emphasis on the single and unique external mounting bayonet :**



**Recently it was found a body of what would be a future prototype of model IV. The basis of the new shutter led to the prototype of first Contax IIa presented in documents from September 1945. This model was latter produced in Sttutgart. The new speed control and syncho contacts were applied in the Sttutgarts "black dial" Contaxes. The exposure meter foreruns the system further employed on Model III Contax.**

**Certainly it was also the basis of the lost Syntax whose patent drawings were later found in France.**

**Zeiss Historica**



www.depatisnet.de US000002199464A Contax IV camera patents

May 7, 1940. H. KUPPENBENDER ET AL. 2,199,464

PHOTOGRAPHIC CAMERA

Filed Oct. 11, 1938 6 Sheets-Sheet 1

Fig. 1

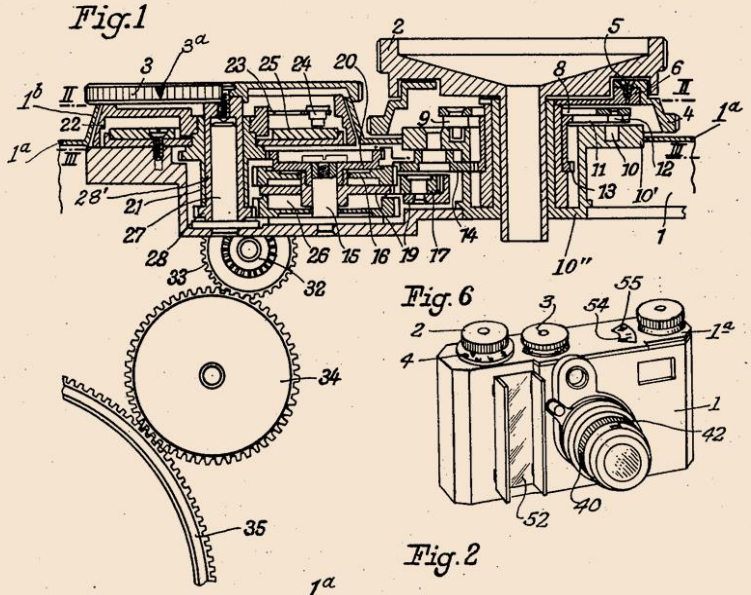
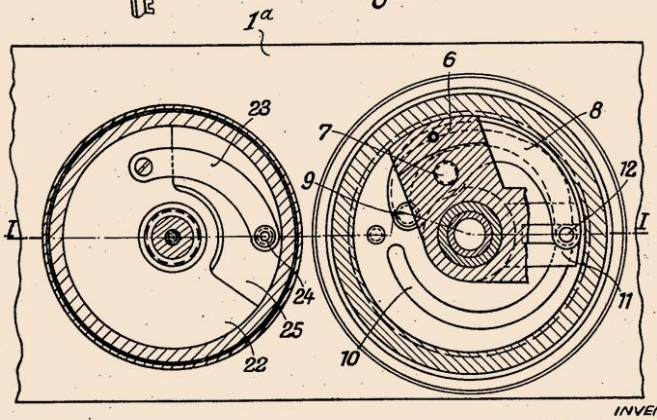



Fig. 6




Fig. 2

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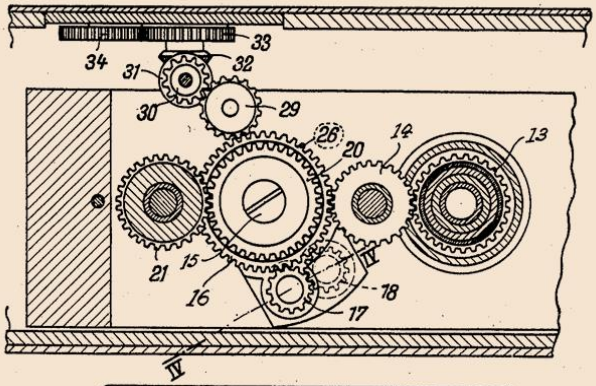
PHOTOGRAPHIC CAMERA

Filed Oct. 11, 1938 6 Sheets-Sheet 2

Fig. 3



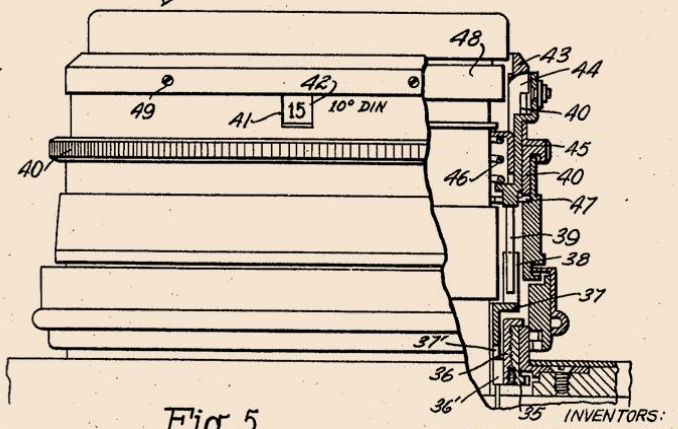




Fig. 5

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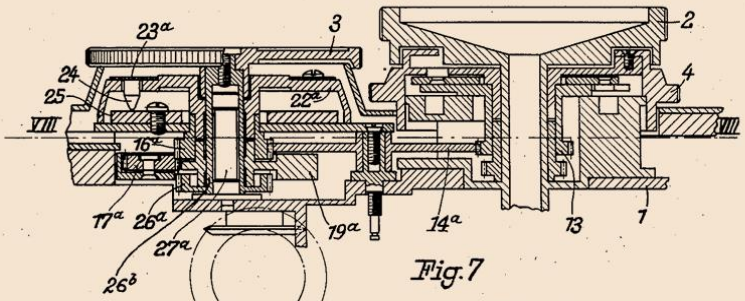



Fig. 7

Fig. 4

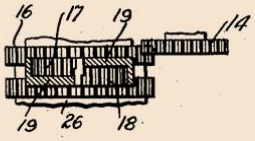
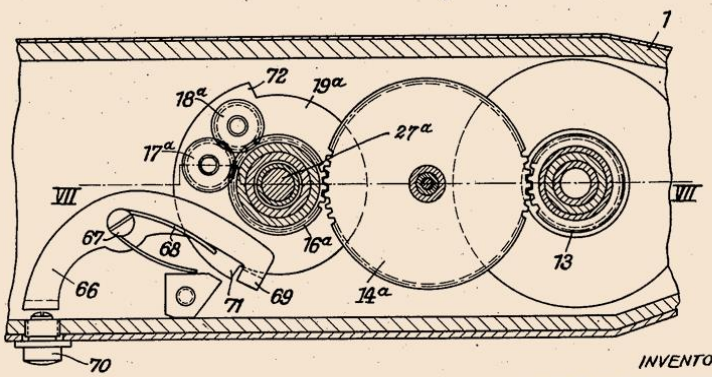



Fig. 8

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PHOTOGRAPHIC CAMERA

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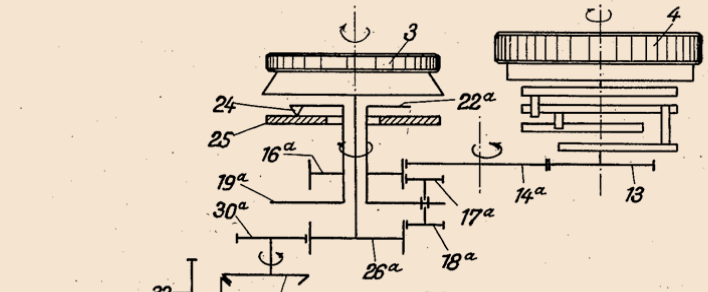



Fig. 9

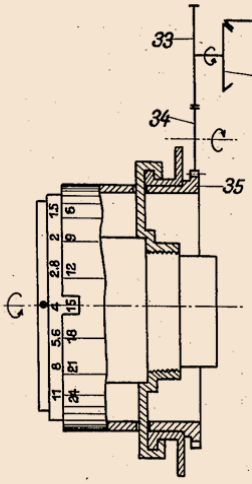
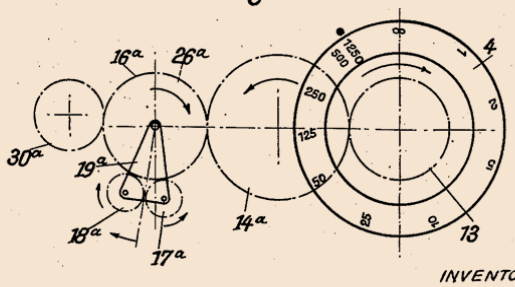



Fig. 10

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PHOTOGRAPHIC CAMERA

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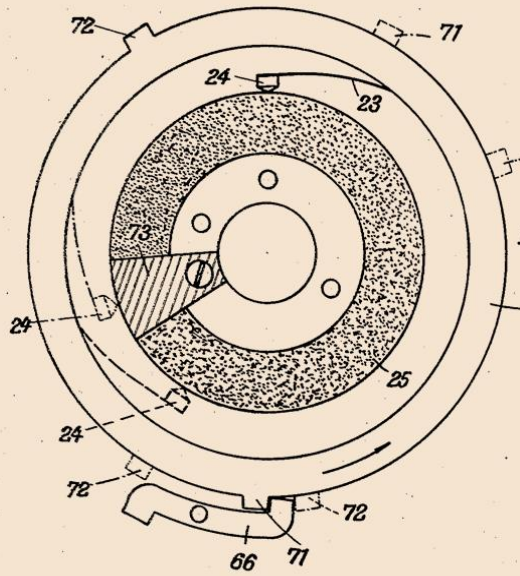


Fig. 11

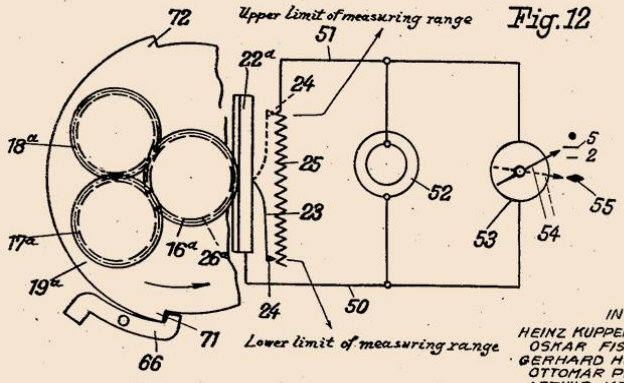


Fig. 12

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PHOTOGRAPHIC CAMERA

Filed Oct. 11, 1938 6 Sheets-Sheet 6

Fig. 13

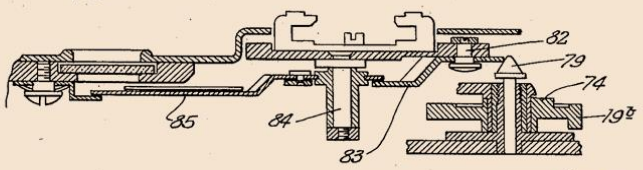



Fig. 15

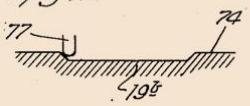



Fig. 14

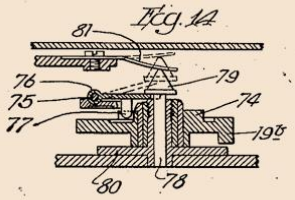



Fig. 16

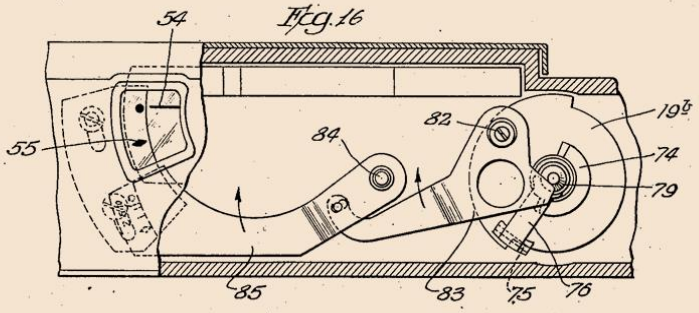
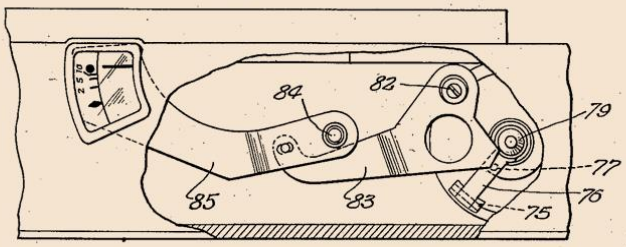



Fig. 17

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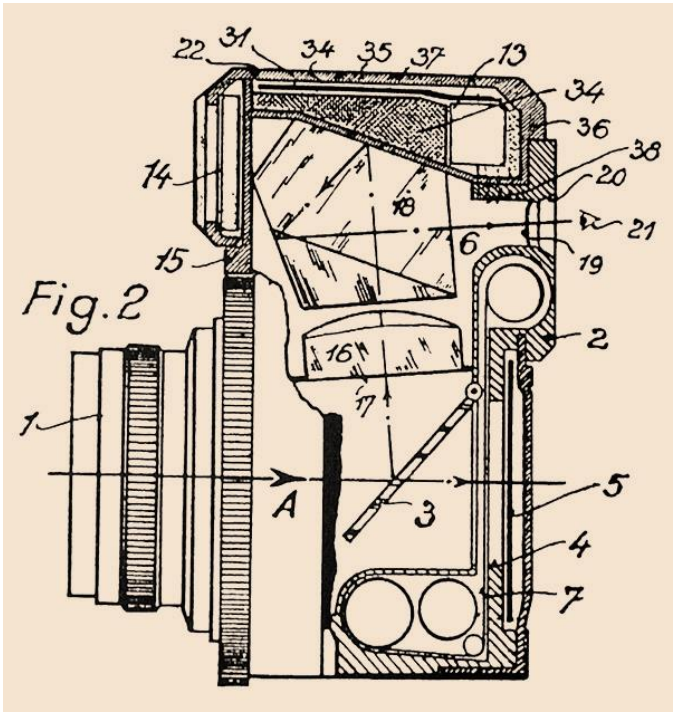
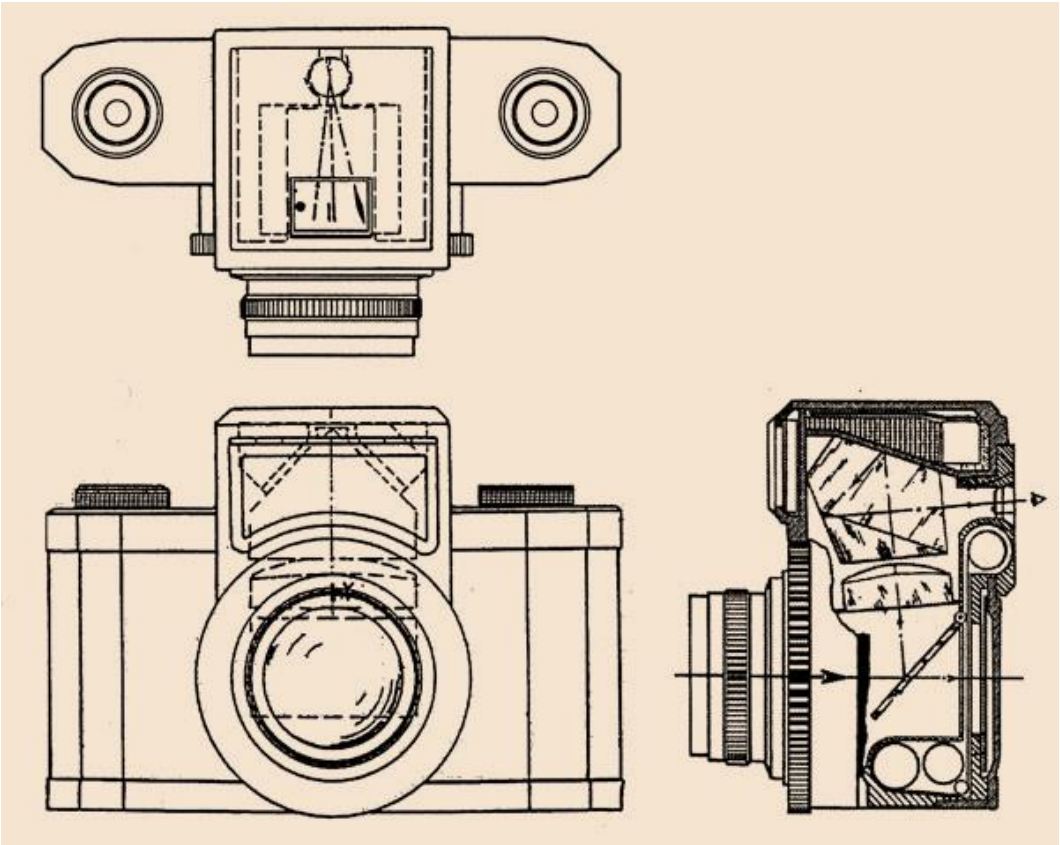
# Zeiss Ikon Contax Spezial


**This unusual prototype shows the Contax Spezial . In a wider body , with the same mechanics of the current production Contax II with Nettax frame counter, is built a fixed Sonnar type lens 1.5 of 60 mm . No self timer. This special model was built in 1939 intended for the "Gestapo" forces in order to do pictures for people reconnaissance. This focal length was suitable to crisp pictures at a distance. The high aperture lens turns the camera useful in any available ambient light. Observe; they were using "Eric Salomon who mastered Ernostar, the Sonnar forerunner, to otain unsuspected pictures.**

## The Syntax


**“Syntax  Der Verlorene PP SLR”. Computer prepared  artistic image according descriptions in authentic documents from Marco Kröger**





**Syntax schematics (Patent Drafts)**

**Samuel Sherman speculates this camera existed, and according to Hubert Nerwin, in 1945 a Soviet soldier appropriated for himself this prototype from the factory. In 1948 he returned the camera for repair once it was not working properly. This reflex camera was built from a Contax II base. Is it there still in Russia? - Zeiss Historica autumn 1990**

**As we said previously this is a technical approach on the point of view of developments occurred in the pre-war and during war years. For those interested in know more, I recommend this extraordinary description prepared by Altix at rangefinder .ru:**

**http://rangefinder.ru/club/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=15284**
**http://rangefinder.ru/club/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=15284&start=20**
**http://rangefinder.ru/club/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=15284&start=40**
**http://rangefinder.ru/club/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=15284&start=60**
**http://rangefinder.ru/club/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=15284&start=80**
**http://rangefinder.ru/club/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=15284&start=100**
**http://rangefinder.ru/club/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=15284&start=120**
**http://rangefinder.ru/club/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=15284&start=140**
**http://rangefinder.ru/club/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=15284&start=160**

**The articles of Bernd K. Otto, cited by our member Ullrich and Jacques M.**

http://fotos.cconin.de/ussrphoto/conkie_1.pdf
http://fotos.cconin.de/ussrphoto/conkie_2.pdf
http://fotos.cconin.de/ussrphoto/conkie_3.pdf
http://fotos.cconin.de/ussrphoto/conkie_4.pdf
http://fotos.cconin.de/ussrphoto/conkie_5.pdf
http://fotos.cconin.de/ussrphoto/conkie_6.pdf
http://fotos.cconin.de/ussrphoto/conkie_7.pdf

**an enormous quantity of data in the published issues of Zeiss Histórica published at:**

http://zeisshistoricasociety.org/

**the article of Peter Henning at**

http://www3.telus.net/public/rpnchbck/zconrfKiev.htm

**The translation at USSRphoto:**

http://ussrphoto.com/Wiki/default.asp?WikiCatID=35&ParentID=4&ContentID=1586&Item=Zeiss+WWII+History+%28German%29

**and the summarized text by the same Altix at:**

http://ussrphoto.com/Forum/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=2456&whichpage=1
http://ussrphoto.com/Forum/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=2456&whichpage=2

**Regrettably, all the lost prototypes and documents - and finally science - that could be at the reach of those who foresees a better world, was mainly due to the US Army operation "Paperclip" which ultimately destroyed all surviving documentation in Dresden turning effectively for years every efforts in perfecting products and manufacturing processes, towards mankind progress, into useless scrap. Some surfacing elements that appear once and then, astonishes everyone interested in the history of those days.**

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