



This German-posed photo, which appeared in *The New York Times* on June 30, 1940, seems to show the Nbfz in mass production – but only five such tanks were built. Such propaganda confused and frightened the rest of the world. NYT Pictures.

RESEARCH DATA

N A Z I G E R M A N Y ' S FIRST SUPER TANK

The pre-Panzer Neubaufahrzeug

BY GEORGE R. BRADFORD

PANTHER, Tiger, King Tiger – these were the legendary tanks of World War II Germany's vaunted Panzer Korps.

But lost in the fog of war is the first heavy tank built by the Nazis, the Neubaufahrzeug (Nbfz). It would be classified as a medium tank today, but in the years before the war it was publicized as the flagship of the German Panzers.

In 1933 the Wehrmacht issued a contract to Rheinmetall-Borsig of Düsseldorf for a multi-turret, 20-ton tank armed with a low-velocity 7.5cm gun and a 3.7cm antitank gun. The guns in

the main turret would be complemented by secondary machine-gun turrets.

The first Rheinmetall drawings showed a vehicle 6.6m long, 2.19m wide, and 2.98m tall. Some features, such as the driver's cupola and the suspension components, resembled an earlier Rheinmetall design for a medium tank called the "Grosstraktor."

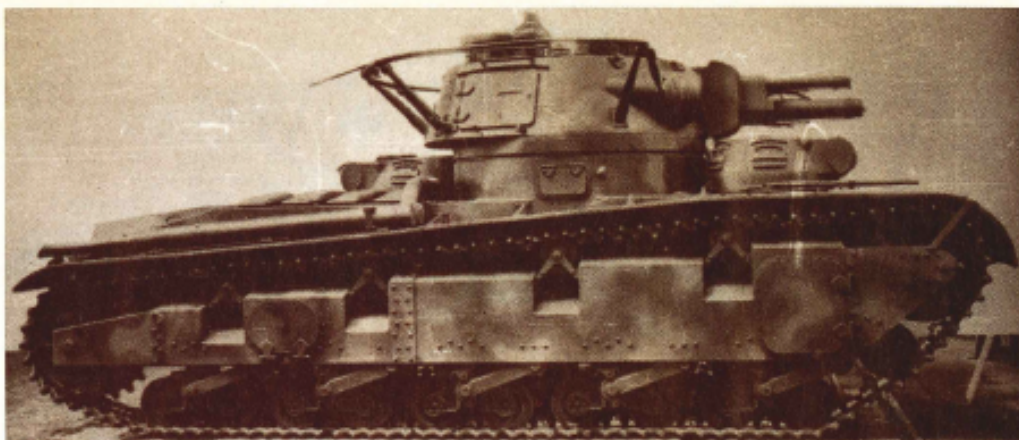
However, several design changes were made before the first two soft-steel prototypes were built, including a new rear deck with cowled grilles. The project was code named "Neubaufahrzeug" (new construction vehicle).

The two prototypes were ready for trials by the end of 1934. The chassis and suspension passed the tests,

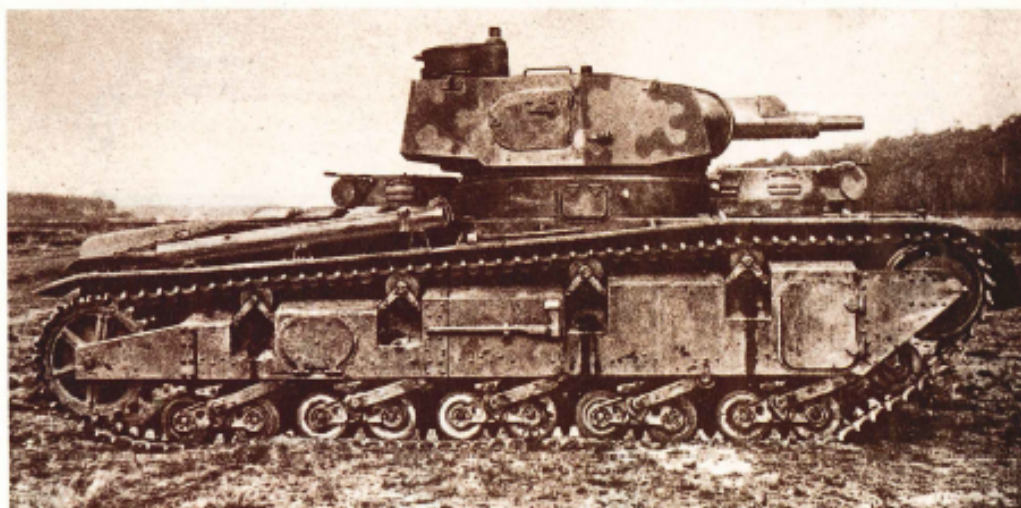
which produced an order for three more such chassis with proper armor plating.

The complex main turret was another matter. The combination gun mount, stacking the two main weapons, was hard to service, and the rail antenna was outdated. Opening the rear-hinged turret hatches immediately exposed the crew to fire. Krupp of Essen was ordered to design and manufacture new turrets.

By 1935, Rheinmetall had completed three armored hulls. Krupp's new turret featured simple lines with mostly flat surfaces, main weapons mounted side by side, a ball-mounted machine gun in the front plate, and a



Rheinmetall-Borsig's mild-steel prototype with the early main-turret design featuring a frame aerial, prominent coaxial machine-gun mount, and rear-hinged turret hatches. Note the machine-gun turrets and stacked main armament. Photo from the author's collection.



This NbFz carries a Krupp turret but still has the early-style machine-gun turrets. From the author's collection.

stowable rod antenna at the upper left rear. Side hatches were hinged to the front to shield the crew.

All five vehicles featured secondary MG13 machine-gun turrets. After the war started in 1939 the three armored vehicles' machine-gun turrets were upgraded with PzKpfw I mantlets and MG34 machine guns. Photos indicate that the two mild-steel prototypes never received these refits.

Combat in Norway. The three armored Neubaufahrzeuge were

attached to PzAbt zbV 40 (tank battalion, for special employment) and were shipped to Norway, where they entered action in April 1940.

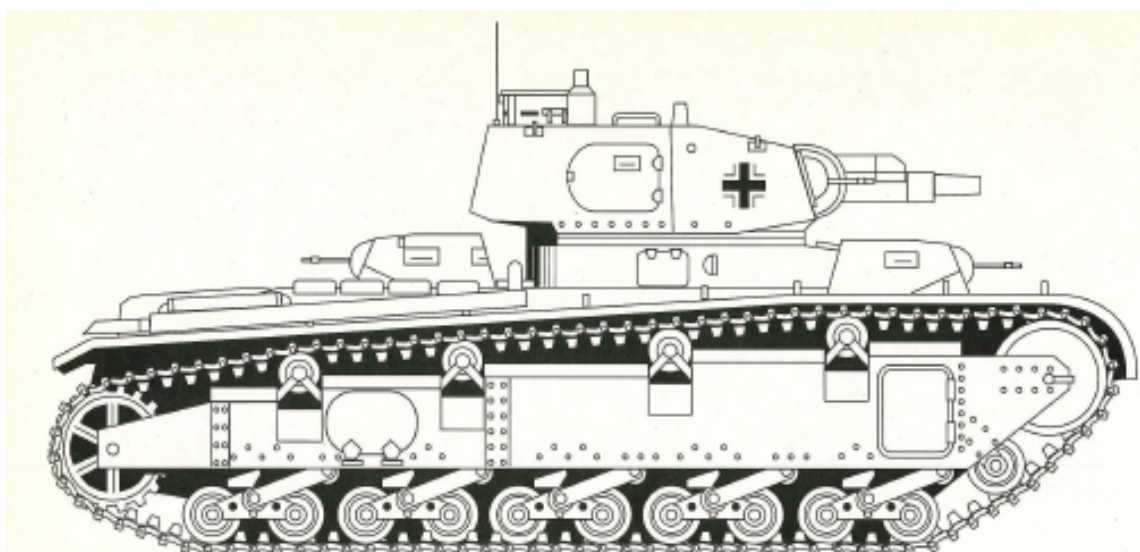
One NbFz of PzAbt zbV 40, accompanied by a PzKpfw II and four PzKpfw I's, attacked British troops at Andalsnes and moved through Lillehammer back toward Oslo.

Although the German attack was successful, the NbFz was destroyed by its crew after it bogged down in a creek bottom near Lillehammer dur-

ing the battle, blocking the advance of other vehicles – or so the story goes. The best evidence of the incident is a photo that shows a widely scattered wreckage which includes parts of an NbFz suspension.

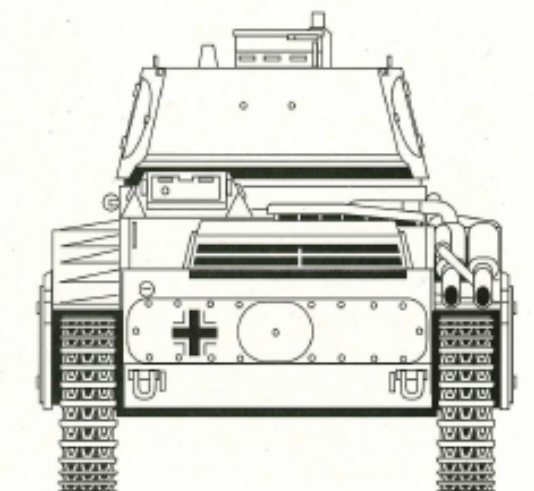
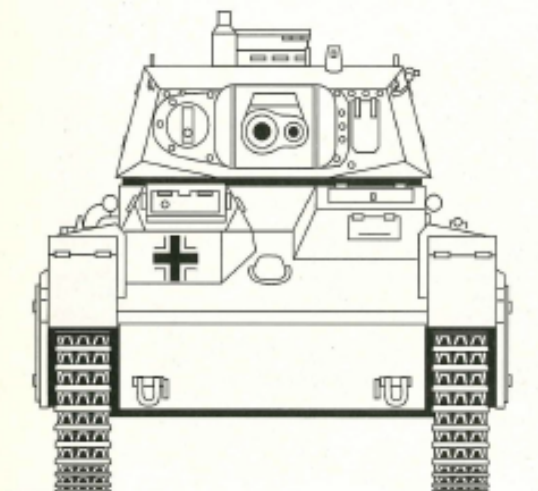
After the April campaign the two surviving Neubaufahrzeuge were stationed with the occupation forces at Fortress Akershus in Oslo, and returned to Wuensdorf, Germany, late in 1940.

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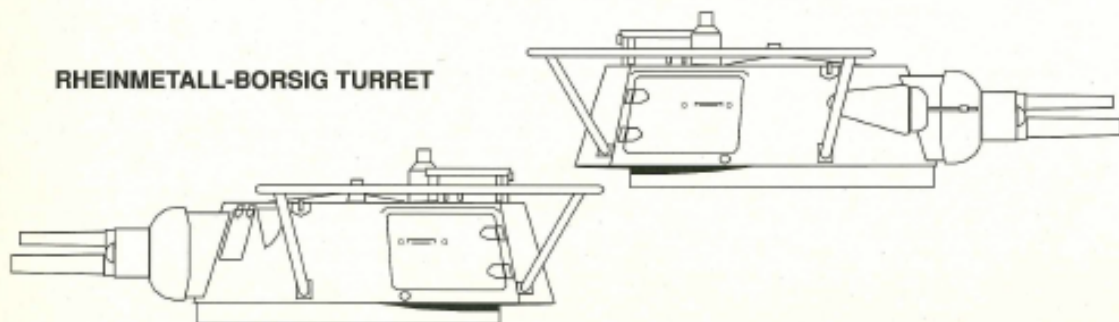


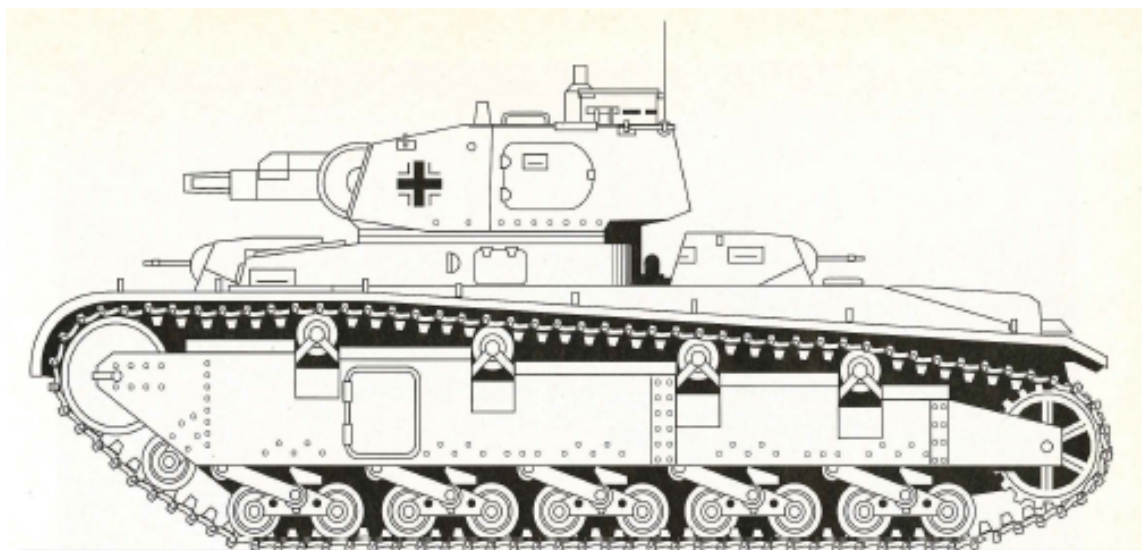
NEUBAUFahrZEUG (KRUPP TURRET)

1/35 SCALE



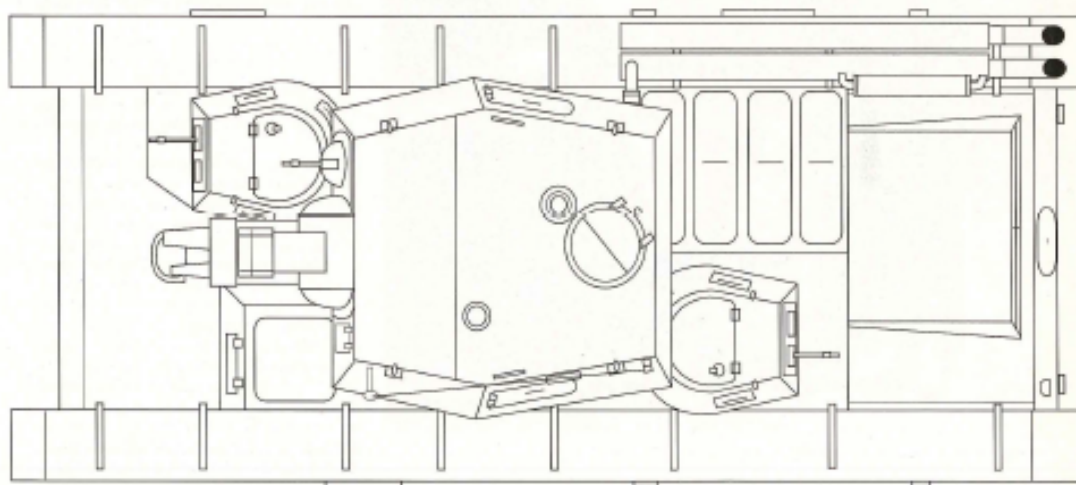
RHEINMETALL-BORSIG TURRET





NEUBAUFahrZEUG

Dimensions:	Length - 6.6m (21'8") Width - 2.91m (9'6") Height - 2.98m (9'8")	Armor:	Turret front - 15mm Superstructure - 13mm Hull front - 20mm
Weight:	23.41 tons	Engine:	BMW V8
Armament:	7.5cm KwK L/24; 3.7cm KwK L/45; 7.92mm MG13; two 7.92mm MG34	Speed:	19 mph
Traverse:	360° (hand operated)	Range:	75 miles
Elevation:	-10° to +22°	Manufacturer:	Rheinmetall-Borsig, Düsseldorf
Crew:	Six	Production:	Two prototypes produced in 1934; three experimental vehicles in 1935



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GEORGE R. BRADFORD

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(Above) The Nbzfz Jumbo, not long after one of its crew was killed in fighting near Oslo. The inscription on the turret appears to memorialize Feldw. (Sgt. Maj.) Faulhaber, with the date "25.4.40" noted below his name. From the author's collection.



(Left) German tankers relax with a late-model Nbzfz at Fortress Akershus in Oslo, Norway. Photo courtesy of Rudi Ehninger.

Short tour on the Eastern Front. Operation *Barbarossa*, Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, began on June 22, 1941 – and ended less than a week later for the last two armored *Neubaufahrzeuge*.

Their destruction was witnessed by an officer of the Soviet 8th Mecha-

nized Corps, G.I. Penezko. In his book, *War Diary of a Soviet Officer*, he writes that on June 28, in a counterattack at the village of Zablote, a group of Soviet KV I heavy tanks encountered two "Rheinmetall" tanks with 75mm guns. When hit by the KV I 76mm shells, the German tanks disin-

tegrated. "What's the matter, are they made of paper?" he had asked incredulously.

Penezko had identified the German tanks from recognition photos, and his matter-of-fact description of the incident leaves little doubt about the fate of the last two Nbzfz tanks in combat.

Nbzfz smokescreen. The two soft-metal prototypes were more successful, serving as training vehicles and confusing the enemy.

Propaganda photos of these "tanks" confounded Allied intelligence. The 1941 U.S. Manual TM 30-450, *Handbook on German Military Forces*, named the Nbzfz "PzKpfw VI," possibly armed with 105mm and 37mm guns, weighing 45 tons with 75mm-thick armor, and carrying a crew of seven or eight.

Whether this "disinformation" was produced by German agents or nervous speculation, it was a short-lived success for the Nbzfz. All too soon the Allies would gain firsthand knowledge of German heavy tanks. **FSM**