

Warrant Officer C L W Abraham BEM

As a regular veteran, WO Abe Abraham came to 609 in 1938 as the Engineering Officer, and was demoted to Assistant, or deputy, the following year after the posting in of a commissioned officer, Fg Off C Harvey. It has been recorded in the Squadron diary, and elsewhere, that without the efforts of WO Abraham, exhorting every last ounce of skill and energy from the entire groundcrew, 609 would not have enjoyed the success that it did. Indeed the engineering task increased vastly overnight in May 1942 when the squadron re-equipped with Hawker Typhoon Mk1a (with 12 Browning machine guns) and 1b (with 4 20mm cannons). As one of the first squadrons to obtain these brand new aircraft, all the teething problems had to be ironed out, including the unreliability of the huge Napier Sabre engine, the unwillingness of the undercarriage to retract, and the propensity of the cannon to fire itself on landing. Most serious of all was the possibility of the tail unit to separate from the rest of the airframe during a power dive. All these problems, and more, were ironed out by the groundcrew in record time, so that by the time the pilots were proficient on the machine, the machines were ready for effective use.

WO Abraham, whilst having accumulated vast experience in the years of regular service, was not particularly "au fait" with foreign uniforms. In September 1942, the Squadron moved back to Biggin Hill and reoccupied its former dispersal site. At the same time, 133 (American Eagle) Squadron were moving out and 340 (French) Squadron were moving in to temporary accommodation. Also on the unit was 401 (Canadian) Squadron. The French, however, was the cause of the problem, since their uniform carries about as much gold braid on one jacket as one is likely to see in the whole of the RAF. Each time WO Abraham walked past a French pilot he would come to attention, salute and call him sir, in the mistaken belief that he was addressing the Commanding Officer.

During the reign of Squadron Leader "Bee" Beamont, the Squadron moved to Manston on the Kent coast, and Bee introduced the squadron to the "Rhubarb" - a single or pair aircraft raid (day and night) on the European mainland. The Typhoon was ideally suited to this task, being able to soak up a lot of punishment without succumbing to the force of gravity, but the extra workload repairing the aircraft gave the groundcrew more hardship and strife. Again WO Abraham was able to extract the necessary effort and the squadron enjoyed as much success with its Typhoon operations as it had with the Spitfire.

Eventually, however, the German High Command restricted target movements to only the darkest nights, and the source of the varied targets dried up. However, the new CO, Squadron Leader Alec Ingle AFC developed the Rhubarb further and demanded bombs to destroy airfields, marshalling yards and barracks - by night. Abe Abraham got together with one of the pilots, Flt Lt Johnny Wells (a future squadron commander), and designed, built and tested the squadron's own bomb sight. How successful this sight was has not been recorded.