



*Fairey Fulmar two-seat fighter of No. 807 Squadron in which VAT Smith saw service launching from the catapult aboard HMS Pegasus.*

#### **FAIREY FULMAR MK I**

**Powerplant:** 1,035 Rolls-Royce Merlin VIII

**Speed:** 236 knots at 9,000 feet

**Range:** 780 nautical miles

**Max Weight:** 10,200 pounds

**Crew:** Two

**Armament:** 8 x 0.303-inch calibre Browning Mk II machine guns, 1 x hand-held Thompson 0.45-inch calibre sub-machine gun

Considered too large, too heavy and too slow the Fulmar nevertheless had several positive attributes. Its weight meant it rapidly accelerated to 390 knots in a dive allowing for one good firing pass before "mixing it". It could fly CAP over the fleet for four hours, double that of a Hurricane, and carried an impressive 750 rounds per machine gun compared to the Hurricane's 334 rounds. Excellent visibility allowed for easier carrier approaches and the huge rear cockpit was appreciated by the observer. Light and responsive on the controls, the Fulmar had no handling vices.

Critical operational deficiencies were lack of speed and a woeful rate of climb, taking fifteen minutes to climb to 15,000 feet. The main fuel tank between the two crew positions was armoured and the pilot had an armoured windscreen, but the observer was unprotected. The first operational unit was No. 806 Squadron which embarked aboard *Illustrious* in September 1940. By the end of that year there were four front-line squadrons including No. 807.

With no aircraft mounted weapon for the rear seat, the desperate stop-gap nature of the type and time was reflected in the Admiralty order that all observers were to be issued a Thompson sub-machine gun. A total of 250 Mk I and 350 Mk II variants were produced. Considerably better than the Skua or the Roc, the Fulmar, inadequate against the latest Italian and German land-based fighters and bombers, nevertheless held the line until Hurricanes and Spitfires could be converted and finally sent to sea from July 1941 and August 1942 respectively. They joined increasing numbers of American-built Grumman F4F Martlets/Wildcats.