

Commander Thomas D Handley RN (1923-2017)



- May 1940 Entered RN as Officer Cadet at Dartmouth.
- Sep 1940 Joined HMS Rodney at Rosyth as Midshipman, awaiting German invasion which never came.
- Nov 1940 Joined HMS Dunedin mainly deployed in patrol and escort duties in central and south Atlantic. Captured one German supply ship and 4 Vichy merchant ships. Did 3rd officer duties in two of the French ships. Six days after leaving Dunedin she was sunk by U Boat and over 420 of the 500 crew were lost.
- Nov 1941 Left Dunedin and joined destroyer HMS Vansittart at Freetown West Africa. Nov 41 to Feb 42 was employed as watch keeper. Feb 42 ship attacked by German Heinkel 111 which dropped 4 large bombs. Ship took avoiding action thus no hits or damage.
- Feb 1942 Left Vansittart and joined battleship HMS Duke of York. Took part in covering force for 2 Russian convoys together with another battleship, a battle cruiser and an aircraft carrier, German battleship Tirpitz came out and the aircraft carrier was bombed by German aircraft from Norway.
- May 1942 Sub Lieutenants courses UK.
- Sep 1942 Combined operations training. Put in charge of 10 landing craft assault (LCA) carried on converted ocean liner MV Durban Castle. Embarked 1500

US troops and landed them on beach near Oran at beginning of North Africa campaign early Nov.

- Jan 1943 OOW on board aircraft carrier HMS Activity mainly in Clyde.
- May 1943 Pilot flying training mainly in Canada. Awarded wings Dec 43.
- Jan 1944 Leave and operational flying training in Seafires and Spitfires at RNAS Henstridge.
- Jun 1944 Joined 855 Naval Air Squadron flying Seafire 3s in Northern Ireland.
- Nov 1944 Squadron transferred from Seafires to US Hellcat 2.
- Jan 1945 885 embarked in escort carrier HMS Ruler and proceeded via Suez Canal to Australia to disembark new spare FAA aircraft and to put ashore 855 Squadron for final operational training.
- Mar 1945 885 re-embarked in HMS Ruler and proceeded north to friendly harbour in Philippines to meet up with operational British Far East Carrier Force. Some 885 aircraft transferred as replacements for losses in other carriers. With 6 other pilots joined 1844 Squadron in HMS Indomitable.
- May 1945 HMS Indomitable sailed to take part in war against Japan, in particular to attack the Saki Shima Gunta islands to the west of south Japan. The task was to prevent Japanese aircraft from flying out of China to return to Japan for the final conflict. Was one of two Hellcat pilots that flew photo sorties of airfields and harbours in the islands, being first and last over targets so that results of raids could be assessed. Did most of the reconnaissance at 25-30,000 feet and, although never fired at by Japanese fighters, AA guns gave anxious moments.
- Jul 1945 Indomitable returned to Australia for R&R.
- Aug 1945 Returned to UK for Air Warfare course.
- 1946 Qualified Flying Instructor course at RAF Little Rissington.
- 1947-48 Flying instructor with RAF teaching mainly naval aircrew.
- 1949 Air Warfare Instructors course.
- 1949-50 Joined 800 Squadron flying Seafire 47s (the last Spitfire/Seafire type built) in HMS Triumph in Far East. Triumph stationed at Singapore/Hong Kong until sent to assist Australian forces in Japan.
- Jun 1950 HMS Triumph en route to UK when Korean War broke out. Triumph sent to US base at Okinawa, then to join USS Valley Forge for air war over Korea. As senior pilot of 800 Squadron took part in operations in British Sector of Korean War. Squadron CO killed in accident on board. Made CO as acting Lieutenant Commander. After 3 months of hostilities Triumph released to return to UK.
- Jan 1951 Jet pilot conversion courses.
- Nov 1951 Appointed CO of 2nd jet squadron in FAA flying Attackers at RNAS Hal Far, Malta.
- Jun 1952 Embarked in HMS Eagle home-based.

Jan 1953 Appointed Chief Flying Instructor at Naval Air Fighter School, RNAS Culdrose, which moved to RNAS Lossiemouth later that year.

Apr 1955 Lt Cdr Flying HMS Centaur.

Jun 1956 Staff of Flag Officer Flying Training.

Jan 1957 Promoted Commander in command of a minesweeper.

Apr 1958 Commander Air, HMS Centaur. Work up Sep 58.

May 1959 HMS Centaur deployed to Far East.

Jan 1960 Staff Course at RNC Greenwich.

Sep 1960 DAOT Admiralty.

Oct 1963 Commander and Commander (Air) at RNAS Hal Far, Malta.

Oct 1966 Naval Attaché, Istanbul.

Apr 1967 Naval Attaché, Tehran.

Dec 1972 Resident Naval Officer Mombasa and Advisor to Kenyan Navy.

1 Jan 1967 Retired.

24 Jun 2017 Died at Beacon Court, Dartmouth.