

## Information sheet no 013

### Michael Le Fanu

Michael Le Fanu was born 2 August 1913 at Lindfield, Sussex. After junior officer's training, Le Fanu spent three years in destroyers before qualifying as a gunnery officer in 1938. He was appointed to the staff of the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean until October 1939 when he left to become gunnery officer of the cruiser HMS *Aurora*. He was Mentioned in Dispatches for his competence and bravery during the Norwegian campaign. He was later awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his services in a successful night action against a heavily escorted Italian convoy in the Mediterranean in 1941.

In June 1942, Le Fanu joined the staff of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet as Gunnery Assistant. Le Fanu married Prudence Morgan in 1943 and they later had two sons and one daughter. In March 1944, he was promoted Commander and served as Gunnery Officer in HMS *Howe* in the Far Eastern Fleet. He was appointed liaison officer to the United States Navy, a post which he held until the end of the war with Japan. He was tasked with the arrangements for the Japanese surrender on board the USS *Missouri* on 2 September 1945. He distinguished himself in this role and received the Legion of Merit in recognition for his services to the US navy.

At the end of World War II, Le Fanu served in a variety of staff appointments and was promoted Captain in 1949. In 1951, he undertook his first command with the 3rd Training Squadron at Londonderry, undertaking anti-submarine activities. In 1952, he was employed on special duties in the Admiralty under the Chief Scientist to investigate the problems of atomic warfare. He then served for one year at the Imperial Defence College before taking command of the boys' training establishment HMS *Ganges* in 1954. In 1957 he was given command of the aircraft carrier HMS *Eagle* and promoted Rear-Admiral in 1958. His first appointment in this rank was Director-General, Weapons. He held this post until 1960.

In 1960, Le Fanu was appointed Companion of the Bath and served for one year as Second-in-Command, Far East Station and later promoted to Vice-Admiral. From 1961, he served as Controller of the Navy with a seat on the Board of Admiralty and received the Knight Commander of the Bath in 1963. Le Fanu was promoted Admiral in 1965 and became Joint Commander of the three services in the Middle East for one year during the period of British evacuation from the area. In 1968, he was appointed First Sea Lord and made a Knight Grand Cross of the Bath (GCB).

During his time as First Sea Lord, the decision was made to abolish the naval tot – the rum ration beloved of the lower rates. Although the reform was mainly driven by the Second Sea Lord, Admiral Frank Twiss, Le Fanu was keenly aware of the sensitivity of the subject and various compromises were made to soften the blow. He earned the nickname of "Dry Ginger". Due to a terminal illness, Le Fanu retired as Admiral of the Fleet on 3 July 1970 at the age of 56. Although nominated for the post of Chief of Defence Staff starting in October 1970, he was unable to take up the appointment. The last tot was issued on 31 July just weeks after he had retired, his successor being Admiral Sir Peter Hill-Norton. He died in London on 28 November.