

# profile...

## Emphasizing research and new products, he increased sales 500% for Naugatuck agricultural chemicals

IN THE United States' early days, a popular poem told of the returning soldier's request for "a little farm well tilled." The popular feeling it expressed was that a man, once brought up on a farm, belonged there, and longed for the rural way of life. All well and good. But it does not begin to explain how George R. Vila—by experience a stalwart in the rubber industry, by training a chemical engineer, and reared in Philadelphia, the nation's fourth largest city—developed his interest in the agricultural chemicals business.

At first he was simply not interested; actually a few decades back there was very little true agricultural chemical science in which to develop an interest. Young Vila pursued a liberal arts course at Wesleyan University in Middleton, Conn., majoring in chemistry. There he received his A.B. in 1932. He then attended MIT, graduating the following year with a master's degree in chemical engineering.

Vila started his industrial career in the rubber industry. His initial job was with Boston Woven Hose & Rubber Co. (Cambridge, Mass.) as a production and development engineer. Vila recalls that jobs were hard to get in those days and that one had little or no choice as to the company or industry he would enter. Many in his graduating class did not get an offer of a job right away, and he considered himself extremely fortunate to have what he considered at the time a gilt-edged job with a prominent company. As things turned out, he was glad of an opportunity to enter the rubber field even though the choice was more by chance than by design at the time.

Three years later, in 1936, Vila joined Naugatuck Chemical as a technical representative, handling sales in the rubber chemicals department. He has been with Naugatuck or its parent, United States Rubber, ever since. Today he is a group executive vice president of U. S. Rubber, responsible to its president for operations of the Naugatuck Chemical, international, textile, and plantation divisions, Latex Fiber Industries, and Dominion Rubber Co., Ltd.

In 1942, Vila transferred to Nauga-

tuck's research and development department as a research chemist. Here he worked on GR-S synthetic rubber, and a year later was appointed manager of synthetic rubber research and development. In this position he pioneered in formulation of experimental synthetic rubbers, tailored to fit specific end uses. He also helped initiate the adaptation of statistical control methods to synthetic rubber manufacture, in what was one of the first examples of the application of statistical control concepts to a chemical manufacturing process. Such concepts are gaining increasingly wide acceptance in the manufacture of fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemicals for agriculture.

Following World War II, Vila went to Germany under the auspices of the Technical Industrial Intelligence Committee. His purpose: to study the research and development phases of the German synthetic rubber industry. The mission obtained some fundamental information on cold polymerization, and, upon his return to Naugatuck, Vila began research work which led to the development of cold GR-S.

Later in 1945, he became assistant general development manager both for Naugatuck and for U. S. Rubber's synthetic rubber division. The following year he was appointed sales manager, handling Naugatuck's latex and plastic products. In this job he organized the division's present plastics sales department.

In 1949, he was promoted to general sales manager of Naugatuck Chemical, supervising plastic, latex, and agricultural chemicals sales. It was at this point that his first direct work with agricultural chemicals began. Four years later he became Naugatuck's assistant general manager, and last year, general manager and a vice president of U. S. Rubber. Several months later he assumed his present post as group executive vice president.

Under Vila's direction, Naugatuck's agricultural chemicals sales have soared—from less than \$1 million in 1949 to more than \$5 million in 1957. The division's agricultural products fall into four main categories: insecti-



**George R. Vila**

Born on March 12, 1909, in Philadelphia, Pa. Wesleyan University, B.S., Chem., 1932; MIT, M.S., Chem. Eng., 1933. Engineer, Boston Woven Hose & Rubber, 1933-36. Technical rep., Naugatuck Chemical, 1936-42; research chemist, 1942-43; mgr., synthetic rubber research and development, 1943-45; asst. gen. dev. mgr., 1945-46; sales mgr., latex and plastic products, 1946-49; gen. sales mgr., 1949-53; asst. gen. mgr., 1953-57; gen. mgr., 1957. Vice president, U. S. Rubber, 1957; group executive vice president, 1957 to date.

cides, herbicides, fungicides, and specialties (including growth regulators). Among these, insecticides account for the greatest sales volume.

Vila calls his company's work for agriculture its contribution toward a sort of "chemical automation," and says the increasing need for greater productivity will continue to foster demands for new and better agricultural chemicals.

The turning point in Naugatuck's agricultural chemicals activity came under Vila in '49. The organic structures its rubber chemists studied were also applicable in many cases to agricultural chemicals. Indeed, that was how the company had originally entered the field in 1937, after which it rounded out its line with formulations. Vila felt that to be successful a company had to be either a national formulator or a dominant local—anything between would fail. So Naugatuck got out of the middle.

"We decided to put still more emphasis on research, and try to come up with some new chemicals that no one else had." Salesmen tried to sell research. And with Vila at the helm, they succeeded.