PERSONAL

profile...

He has skillfully guided Dow's ag chemicals department since its inception a decade ago

"My main job is to encourage the boys to work like blazes." That's Joseph W. ("Bill") Britton's terse description of his job as manager—for the past 10 years—of agricultural chemicals at Dow.

Britton works to see that all in his department succeed to the best of their ability. He takes a personal interest in what they're doing, asks questions, stirs up enthusiasm, urges the "fresh approach."

As Britton points out, he also makes "daily runs with the 'fire department,' putting out the 'fires' that keep turning up, tackling special problems." This might involve satisfying the unusual requirements of a new customer, drafting an agreement on foreign patent rights, or scheduling an all-important test run at the pilot plant. Or, as a long-range project, it might mean setting the company's course for future ag chemicals growth.

The success of all these efforts is confirmed by Dow's 1958 annual report. "The agricultural chemicals group held up extremely well," it points out. For the fiscal year ended May 31, 1958, ag chemicals were the one broad area of sales that showed a gain over 1957. And for 1959, the sales picture should be even better, says Britton. "These gains," he emphasizes, "can be attributed to hard work by our sales department and all who stand with sales—research, development, production, everyone."

Much of this growth stems from the variety of new products introduced by Dow during the past year or two. One of these is Dowpon (dalapon), a herbicide used to control grass in sugar cane, along highways and railroads, and on industrial sites. Another is Trolene, an orally administered grub killer for beef cattle and breeding stocks. Another is Zoamix (zoalene), effective in preventing coccidiosis in chickens; now being sold in Canada, it is awaiting FDA clearance in the U. S.

Dow often stresses products that are unique, but has also made a special point of doing its own formulating of many ag chemicals. "It's not enough to sell a chemical that, in turn, is formulated by outside companies," Britton believes. "The basic manufacturer should also prepare the product in the form in which it will be used. In this way, he takes responsibility for ultimate performance, and has a direct hand in providing reliable, clear-cut directions for use. This is absolutely essential with new materials. Even if it may not be necessary with old, established products, it's certainly desirable."

This has been one of the guiding principles of Dow's agricultural chemicals department—or what in Midland is popularly referred to as Britton's department.

Bill Britton grew up in the farming community of Rockville, Ind. His father was a builder of covered wooden bridges. For two years after he was graduated from high school, young Britton helped his father—and his three older brothers—build bridges in various parts of Indiana.

In 1916, Bill Britton entered the University of Illinois as a chemistry major. A year and a half later, with U. S. entry into World War I, he joined the Army Air Force as a cadet pilot. He was on the point of taking advanced flying training when the war ended and he returned to school—this time the University of Michigan. There, he received his A.B. and M.S. After a year and a half of graduate work at the University of Illinois, he taught inorganic and analytical chemistry for a year at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

At the urging of his brother Edgar, then an organic chemist at Dow, Bill accepted a position as research chemist at the Midland plant in 1923. He was soon taking an important hand in Dow's early work on organics.

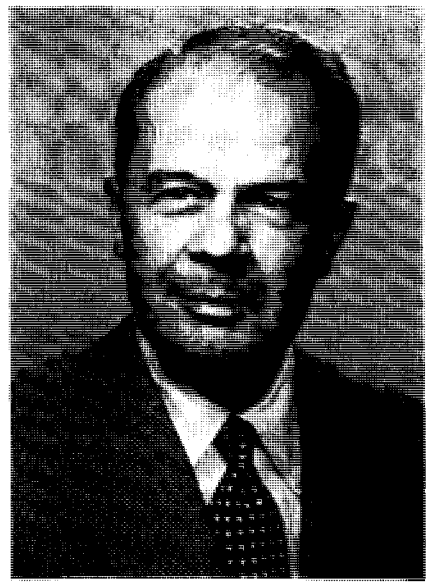
Britton helped develop processes for making phenol, aniline, benzoic acid, and aspirin. Later, he became head of Dow's production of coumarin, phenyl salicylate, phenacetin, triphenyl phosphate, phenyl ethyl alcohol, and phosphorus oxychloride. After five years in manufacturing, he was given the especially challenging job of trouble-shooter in one of the organic production departments. And in 1934, when Dow set up a semi-works plant for making styrene, vinyl chloride, and other organics, Britton was placed in charge.

His first real exposure to agricultural chemicals came in 1938, when his department began making dinitrocyclohexylphenol, used in controlling mites on citrus. From then on, Britton's interests shifted more and more to ag chemicals. In the early 1940's, he played a key role in Dow's pioneering efforts as a commercial producer of 2,4-D and its derivatives. By 1949, the ag chemicals field had become such a vital segment of Dow's operations that it was set up as a separate department, with Britton as manager.

Among his outside activities, Britton served for three years on the Agricultural Committee of the U. S. Chamber of Commerce. He was a member of AG AND FOOD's advisory board for 1956-58.

Especially around the Midland area, Britton is recognized as an expert on the geology of the Great Lakes region. While "no profound student of geology," he has made extensive studies on the impact of the Ice Age on this region 20,000 to 60,000 years ago.

Although no longer a gardener, he has for many years turned over parts of his home lawn to the testing of new Dow herbicides. Whether the 1959 plot yields a luxuriant growth of blue grass, completely free of weeds, will depend in large measure on the effectiveness of one of Dow's newest and most promising ag chemicals. Sorry, you'll have to wait; it's still experimental.



Joseph W. Britton

Born Sept. 20, 1896, Rockville, Ind. University of Michigan, A.B., chemistry, 1921, M.S., chemistry, 1922. Dow Chemical Co., organic chemist, 1923–26, production 1926–29, trouble-shooter 1929–34, organic semi-works plant manager 1934–44, departmental production manager 1944–49, manager of agricultural chemicals 1949–present.