Written in 1952(!) - read first.

"ESCAPE FROM MEDIOCRITY"

Being a narrative, scribed in gay good humor, albeit with some serious overtones, relating of an encounter with the Duck Doctors; how we learned from them what it takes to get the Ducks out of the Doldrums and why this don't happen more often; what to do about it when they do get out, and what not to do when they don't.

It is the Frantic First of August. That grim time when "Condition Red" is declared thruout the musty reaches of the Mouldy Chambers. And the Greater White Fathers hold off the eager Sports with one hand, and grab the phone with the other. And they put the heavy blast upon the Lesser W.F.'s, and inquire of them what in Hell is the duck situation as of the moment and we do mean right now.

The L.W.F.'s undertake to run down, smoke out, and otherwise locate the Flyway Biologists and other experts, who have the latest and hottest on this duck situation. Eventually these sterling lads are found, at the several Airmen's Rehabilitation Centers to which they are wont to repair at this season of year on account of being overtook by acute flite fatigue. And the info each is incubating is wrung out of the appropriate spare and wasting frame.

All this info is then fed into the mathemasticating machines, and out comes the Ungarbled Word. Which says that the duck hatch is such this year that we can afford to add (or subtract) one spoonbill per bag, and we also can allow three extra days plus or minus one additional night for pursuit of the flat-faced fowl provided you do it legal. On account of the latest dope from the nesting-

grounds says, (and we quote)....."The May breeding population in the Prairie Provinces has jumped from 11 ducks per square mile last year to 11.8 this year, and July broods have skyrocketed from the long-time average of 0.99 per square mile to a rousing One-Point-Oh."

Then the regulations are announced. Immediately thereafter, nobody is available for comment, except the local Game Agent. And he confesses that he only just now finished memorizing last year's duck laws, and ain't hardly had a chance to digest all this new legislation. Which he just then saw in the MORNING BUGLE while looking for Pogo. We will not record what the Sports have to say, because this communique might eventually find its way into the mails, and we therefore gotta keep it reasonably clean. But we would be safe in reporting that there is unrest among the Fazzints.

Suddenly, over at the Flyboy's Rehab Center, there is commotion down at Table #4. A group of tired looking lads, gaunt and grizzled from the rigors of another summer in the Big Duck Factory, are likewise scanning the BUGLE, but they forget all about Pogo when they see the new Duck Laws. One of these characters lurches to his feet, and bangs his glass on the table. And he says in a hoarse whisper..."The Hell with this noise. There MUST be a better way. Leave us hold a meeting, and see if somebody don't mebbe have a Clue."

We quietly order a fresh round of malts for these lads, and pad in hand, we unobtrusively join them at Table #4. We figure this could be educational. We might even learn something.

We do. We learn that the Duck Laws are supposed to be based on the size of the Duck Crop. But the Duck Crop comes in three distinct sizes: The Super-Crop, the Ordinary Crop, and No Crop a-Tall. On account of the Big Duck Factory, where the ducks are manufactured, is, like all of Gaul, divided into three parts. The Duck Laws, on the other hand, come in widely assorted sizes.

The B.D.F. and the Partibus Tres.

Never having seen this Big Duck Factory in person, we used to think that most ducks were manufactured in Manitoba, at a place called the "Netley Marshes," while the remainder were fabricated at Lake Nebraska and the Louisiana Lakes. The tip sheets which gave us this hot dope also encouraged us to buy up a few shares of common stock in these enterprises, which, if we recall correctly, we did.

(Part I, "The B.O.P.") But these boys now tell us that the real important part of the Big Duck Factory is the B.O.P., which is short for "Bald-Open Prairie." This B.O.P. is a big wad of grasslands, about 100,000 square miles worth, lying in the heart of the Prairie Provinces in western Saskatchewan and eastern Alberta, and running down a ways into Montana and North Dakota. It is genuine Prairie, or at least was, until the wheat farmer found out how easy it was to plow this land on account of there were no stumps. On account of there were no trees.

This B.O.P., they go on to relate, can be the duck-raisin'est place in North America. No crows, no magpies, and just the odd coyote and polecat. All in all, very few varmints that might take a sizeable cut out of the duck patch. However, the thing this country lacks the most of, most of the time, is plain, ordinary, H-two-Oh. It is a dry country. In fact it is semi-arid, and usually is just one thundershower ahead of being a goddam desert.

When it does have water, it is a duck paradise. Let good fall rains soak the soil, and heavy winter snows melt quickly in spring so snow-water runs into the sloughs instead of into the ground, and the B.O.P. is ready to raise ducks. Add liberal spring and summer rains, and these fowl multiply like bacteria.

Helluvit is, this happy situation may come to pass only one or two years out of ten. What is worse, there will be other years when the B.O.P. is just wet enough in spring to suck in a lot of ducks, but not quite wet enough to discourage the wheat farmer. The ducks get busy and shuck out a big hatch of eggs, and the farmers get busy and plow 'em all under. The ducks try again, but now the water supply is fast dwindling away, and if the B.O.P. fails to get good summer rains that year, the ducks have had it.

We suggest to the boys....."A Clue, mebbe?" They nod in solemn agreement, alert the Scribe, and adopt by acclamation this Clue #1. Which states that: "When the B.O.P. is right, it alone will turnout one helluva great crop of ducks. And when there is enough Precip to enable the B.O.P. to do this, all the other parts of the Big Duck Factory will more than likely be running over with water too, and will produce more ducks than usual. So, the B.O.P. is the KEY TO THE SUPER CROP".

(Part II, "The B.C.F.") They then quaff the dregs of their current malts, order up another round, and move on to the next part of the Big Duck Factory. This, we quickly learn, is called the "B.C.F.", which is short for "Big Crow Factory." On account of the large numbers of crows which inhabit the place, and which vie with magpies, polecats, and similar varmints to see who can do in the most duck nests before the farmer plows them under.

Most of this B.C.F., they tell us, is Parkland country, with many ponds and small lakes, and many millions of tiny potholes. All of the ponds and potholes are fringed by willow, alder, or aspen, which function as observation towers for crows and magpies. In between the ponds are stretches of Prairie that used to be grassland, but now are farmed to the approximate extent of 99 and 44/100 percent. Some ducks, like the bluewing and widgeon, seem to prefer the Parklands for nesting. Others, including the mallard, apparently like this B.C.F. just as well as the B.O.P. Many mallards nest here every year, and additional refugee mallards move in out of the B.O.P. whenever it dries up (as usual). Still other ducks, notably the pintail, ain't having none, thank you, and when their preferred grasslands dry up, they head for the only other "Bald-Open" treeless country available, which is the Far North.

This Parkland country can and does raise quite a few ducks. Its water economy (less evaporation per more inches of rainfall) is better than that of the true Prairie Grasslands. However, heavy natural predation, working hand in hand with agricultural interference, usually puts quite a dent in its production of duckhings. It seems to work like this: A mallard hen lays a hatfull of eggs in a Parkland stubblefield. The crows fail to find these eggs, and the old gal figures she has it made when along comes the farmer, plowing for summerfallow, and puts the permanent quietus on this particular nest. The long-suffering momma-duck then goes back to the end of the line, and starts all over. This gives the crows another shot at it, and they seldom miss twice in a row. Another hen might get a real early start, and figure to have her eggs hatched off before the stubble is plowed. But the varmints bust up this little play-house.

This hen's second try then comes off right in the big middle of the plowing season, and has about ad much chance for enduring success as a small flagon in a large flock of Flyboys.

It all adds up to this. The Big Crow Factory can produce a crop of ducks, but this production is heavily handicapped. And the usual crop from this B.C.F. shows it.

"A Clue"? shouts the Airman Moderator. "Alert the Scribe...Oops, belay that transmission.....and Standby one." He then turns to us and says, "Young man, our Scribe appears to have clobbered a landing. All we see of him at the moment is his after-section, which is bearing magnetic zero-nine-four out from under Table #6. We note that you have a pad and a stub of a pencil. We would much admire to have you take over as Scribe, temporary-like, please-suh."

We, of course, are more than happy to do this, and neatly record this Clue #2. Which says: "The Big Crow Factory can, and usually does turn out a fair crop of ducks, a crop that will stand some gunning. The B.C.F. can do this without any help from the B.O.P., which it seldom gets much of anyway. On those rare occasions when the B.O.P. is in full production, this B.C.F. will more than likely turn out an extra good crop too, and together their production makes for the SUPER-Crop.

"But the B.C.F. cannot, by itself, produce a Super-Crop, nor can it alone maintain, year after year, the ultra-high population level resulting from a succession of earlier Super-Crops. By itself, the B.C.F. produces a very ordinary crop, one that seldom is real bad, and hardly ever real good. It is

the kind of a crop that maintains waterfowl populations at safe levels, with some left over for shooting purposes. The B.C.F. is therefore the KEY TO THE SUSTAINING DUCK CROP".

"And this Sustaining Duck Crop," adds another well-malted Airman, "is our Normal Duck Crop. It is too bad that we have to be content with a Norm that is ordinary to the point of being Mediocre, but that's the way things are, and there ain't a damn thing we can do about it. It is a wonder that the Duck Crop ever busts out of this "Mean of Mediocrity", when the most important part of the Big Duck Factory, the B.O.P., is completely out of production eighty percent of the time, and the next most important part, the B.C.F., has got Gremlins in the Gears".

(Part III, The "B.F.F.") Nominations now are declared in order for Part III of the Big Duck Factory, and many portions of the Western Hemisphere immediately are suggested as being worthy of this unique honor. Alaska and the Far North, and some of our Northern States are duly listed as good possibilities, but then everybody tries to get in the act. Ohio is nominated, and then Delaware. The Southerners, voting as a bloc, say if these places warrant consideration, then they will push Louisiana and Florida on account of their Superior Southern Black Mallard. Texas counters by throwing in the Rio Grande Valley, where seventeen Black-bosomed Tree Ducks are now reported nesting, or leastways going thru the motions. (They don't say what's with the Odd one.)

Then somebody suggests that Manitoba be added to the list. This does it, BUT GOOD. It causes the Airman-Moderator to make strangling sounds, and slam his gavel on the rostrum. Which, in turn, collapses once again the frothy heads on the current rounds of malts. Eventually the Moderator gets his transmitter functioning properly, and he sternly says...."Look, if you guys don't quit trying to TARFU this issue, which already is snafued something awful, we will suggest that you all turn in yore helmets and goggles, and we will declare the Cap and Gown to be the Uniform of the Day. And we will rent a hall, with ivy-mantled walls, yet."

"Look," he continues. "There ain't but two real important parts to the Big Duck Factory, the B.O.P. and the B.C.F. We already got these nailed down. If we must have any more, why not let Part III cover Everything Else, including those places that produce a few ducks, those that produce less than that number, and those like Manitoba, that produce hardly any." (We begin to suspect that the Moderator is one of the Sask-Alta delegates, who have sat quietly thru the years while Manitoba was getting all the attention, but who now claim it is their turn at the Gravy-ladle.)

Everybody is agreeable to this "Everything Else" category, except the Manitoba delegates, who are now speechless with rage and therefore unable to utter a dissenting vote. We then undertake to find a name for this Part III. The name "Big Fish Factory" is suggested, and adopted unanimously when someone points out that most of Part III is famous for its production of Lake trout, Grayling, and Arctic Charr. It also produces a variety of aquatic sarpint known locally as the "Jackfish", a reptile that often is referred to in the tourist folders as the "Great Northern Pike."

This B.F.F. also turns out a unique group of aquatic organisms, having flat bills like the Jackfish, but whose scales are modified into feathers of sorts, and whose extra-large pectoral fins serve as wings whenever these creatures get up enough speed to become air-borne. Prominent among these flying-fish are the Scoter, the Whistler, and the Butterball, and, if you go far enough North, the Be-spectacled Clamcracker, whose scales make good sleeping bags, and a subspecies of mackeral known as Old-Squaw. Also, in spots, there are Bluebills and fair numbers of Black-jacks (incorrectly referred to in the bird books as Ringneck ducks.) We have heard of guys bagging these last-named creatures in a rather sporting manner, employing for this purpose a smooth-bore instead of hook and line.

Here and there in this B.F.F. we hear tell of real Eatin' Ducks. The big River Deltas of the Far North and Alaska, and many spots in southern Canada and in our North and Central States (and the Deep South, thank you-suh), turn out fair numbers of the real choice species. But we add them all together, good indifferent, and downright inedible, and we still ain't got much. By itself, the total production of the B.F.F., "Neighbor-Ducks" included, would never make a Super-Crop, and hardly ever a real shootable crop. But in years when both the B.O.P. and the B.C.F. go completely dry and out of production, this B.F.F. could harbor enough refugees from the Prairie nesting grounds to keep these endangered species from winding up on the songbird list.

"Scribe," bellows the Moderator, but we are way ahead of him this time. And we are already busy recording this Clue #3, which says, "The B.F.F. in normal times is important mainly because it produces the piece-de-resistance for the boys who prefer their fish with feathers on 'em. But when things get tough all over, and the Prairie Ducks are hollering "Mayday," as they were during the

Drought of the '30's, the B.F.F. might be the KEY TO SURVIVAL so far as the Eatin' Ducks are concerned. And could carry them past the emergency in such numbers that they could take immediate advantage of subsequent more favorable conditions, and quickly regain their former place on the shootable list."

The Remedy for Mediocrity, and Why it Seldom Works.

"Fine piece of work, Scribe," says the Moderator. "And now, play us back a quick re-hash of what we have agreed upon to date."

We scan our notes, and recant....."Most years, we have to be content with a pretty mediocre crop of ducks. Because the B.O.P. of the Big Duck Factory, the part that could make all the difference, is shut down for alterations such as raising wheat, or else there ain't enough water for its boilers. This throws the entire load onto the B.C.F. and the B.F.F. of this Duck Factory, and these two Branches just ain't got what it takes. These two Lesser Factories, working at their usual rate of output, simply cannot turn out an exceptional Duck Crop. They produce instead a very ordinary crop, one that may vary a bit from year to year, but is seldom bad, and hardly ever real good. It is the Sustaining Duck Crop.

"Now and then both the B.O.P. and the B.C.F. go dry. When this happens, it is strictly MAYDAY for the game ducks. These Prairie birds hole up in the Bush, the Tundra, and anyplace else that is still on the damp side, cavort with the flying fish that are native to such places, and otherwise just hang on until the going gets better. The annual Duck Crop during this period adds up to No Crop a-Tall.

"On rare occasions the B.O.P. gets dripping wet, and goes into real production. When this happens, the adjoining B.C.F. is usually even wetter, and its production also shoots up. Their combined productivity gives us a Super-Crop that year, and gives the Duck Population a shot in the arm. A couple of years like this in a row, and Brother, we got DUCKS."

"Yup," muses the Moderator, "That amazing, but all too rare Escape from Mediocrity. But remember, it takes an unusual pattern of precipitation to get the B.O.P. into high gear. Fall rains, plus heavy winter snowfall, plus quick spring thaw and runoff, PLUS ample spring and summer rains. This combination triggers production of the Super-Crop. But let one element, particularly spring rains, be missing from this detonating device, and we got a dud on our hands. Duck production in the B.O.P. is a "Whole-hawg-or-none" proposition, especially in these days of full-bore agriculture. There was a time when a fairly wet spring might enable the early-nesting mallards and pins to breeze thru a successful early nesting in this B.O.P. and have their young on the wing before dry summer weather caught up with them. But this was before the advent of McCormick, Deering, and the International Harvester people. In this current enlightened era, a half-way wet spring will still encourage ducks to nest in this country, but also encourages the farmer to sabotage their first (and only possible) nesting attempt. It takes a Helluva wet spring these days, wet to the point where it is Agriculture that is sabotaged, to set the B.O.P. up for the Super-Crop of ducks."

Another Airman emerges from his malt, long enough to opine somewhat frothily...."And once we do get a Super-Crop, it takes all branches of the Big Duck Factory, working at full capacity, to maintain it. The Super-Crop

racks the Duck Population up to an extra-high level. But it ain't going to stay this high unless the notoriously short-lived individuals that make up this population are replaced. It takes the B.F.F., plus the B.C.F., PLUS the B.O.P., all cooking on the front burners the following spring to bring about this replacement.

"Right here is the Beetle in the Brew. The B.O.P. never stays in peak production more than two or three years in a row. In these two or three years, its output runs the population way up. Then the following year it folds, and stays out of production mebbe for the next five years. The other Branch Factories, by themselves, can't turn out enough replacements to maintain the high population, so we get one of those "Crash Declines" they tell about."

"Which are only a matter of academic interest," a Paddlefoot (one of the ground-gripping Types of Duck Expert) contributes. "The 'Crash Decline' is the last chapter in the story. We would prefer to open the book more towards the front, where the population is on the INCLINE, rather than the decline. And catch up on our duck-hunting while there are extra ducks to be had. These extras ain't going to keep. Not unless we salt them away in a deepfreeze."

What to do, And when not to do it.

While we are getting these amendments added to the Minutes, we see the Local Game Agent sidle thru the swinging doors. This usually genial gent now wears a harried expression. He glances furtively about, spots the gathering of Duck Doctors, and quietly joins them.

Once more the doors swing open, and a whole passel of Sports comes storming in. There is nothing furtive about these characters. They look downright hostile, about like the underside of a Saskatchewan thundersquall. Immediately they spot the Game Agent, and say....."Yonder he is...Get the tar-bucket. We will add the feathers later, whenever the Guv'mint makes it legal for us to get some."

A somewhat "sticky" situation seems to be in the making, but the Airman-Moderator is more than equal to the occasion. He says, "OK, so you guys are brassed-off. We are too. Why don't you-all join up, buy us a fresh round of malts, and listen while we decide just what it is that we are all mad about?"

So these lads join up, listen for a bit, and soon are in the very thick of the discussion. Their original project of undercoating the Game Agent seems to have been forgotten.

Says one of the Sports...."All of a sudden this begins to make some sense. For example, when your 'B.O.P.' and 'B.C.F.' both go out of production, and there is No Crop a-Tall, that would be a good year for us to quit hunting ducks altogether. It just ain't fair to go on blasting when they get in that kind of shape."

"Well said," comments the Game Agent. "But it wouldn't be necessary to quit altogether. Take it awful easy, yes. But you ain't going to kill many ducks that year anyway. If there is 'No Crop a-Tall', you are going to find it somewhat of a chore to harvest that crop. Furthermore these lads here will already have found out about the situation, and the Duck Laws will be plenty tight that fall."

Turning to the Moderator, he continues, "And you guys can really put the finger on such things, can't you?"

"No strain," says the Moderator. "We can even see it coming."

"Comes a time when we get one of those 'Super-Crops'", says another Sport. "What should we do that year?"

"Ain't you got no imagination?" answers the Moderator. "Get busy and blast Hell out of...,that is to say, harvest that Crop."

"Yes, but couldn't we just take a few that year, and let the balance parlay up to a SOOPER-SUPER-Crop next year?"

"Nope," replies the Moderator. "Remember, it took all Branches of the Big Duck Factory, working at capacity, to turn out the Super Crop in the first place, and it will take all Branches, going full blast the following year, just to maintain that Super Crop. Suppose we did send back twice the usual number of breeders next spring. And they find the B.O.P., the most important Branch of the B.D.F., closed down once again. These breeders would then have to take pot luck in the B.C.F. and the B.F.F., and by the time they paid to the farmer and other varmints the kick-backs that are customary in these Branches, the crop of ducklings that finally emerges once bears the mark of Mediocrity.

"Or, what is worse, they might find the B.C.P. just wet enough to encourage them to try nesting there. But it is not quite wet enough to discourage agriculture. So the farmer sabotages the first nesting attempt, and the duck crop from the B.C.P. that summer is a total failure.

"Furthermore," he continues, "I ain't so sure that we could afford to have a SOOPER-Super-Crop. Suppose the B.C.P. did stay in peak production for 4 or 5 years in a row, along with all the other Branches of the Big Duck Factory. We would soon have so damn many ducks that Brannan & Co. would have to perpetrate a new Farm Plan just to cover the crop damage situation. Remember, Agriculture is a double-barreled weapon insofar as ducks are concerned. It is not content to louse up production on the nesting grounds. It also in effect imposes a ceiling on the number of ducks we can allow to run around loose."

"Coming from you guys," comments another Sport, "this is kinda startling. But it is such sweet music that we would like to have you play that record again."

"Happy to," grins the Moderator. "When we get a Super-Crop of ducks, we would be damn fools not to harvest that crop, because it ain't going to keep. So, we lengthen the season, increase the bag limits, and generally open up the Duck Laws. But.....", and he now looks sadly at this particular Sport," How are you going to react next year when the Crop falls back into the Bracket of Mediocrity? You are going to scream like seventy-nine P-80's firing up, when the Duck Laws get tight once again after having been so liberal."

"Guess you are right," admits the Sport. "But if we really knew the reason, mebbe we would take it more gracefully, Assuming, of course, that you guys really know what is going on up there on the Nesting Grounds, and can tell for sure

when the Fat Years are done with, and Hard Times coming back. And would take the time to tell us the score."

"Be of good cheer, chum," says one of the Airmen. "We can tell. In fact we have had so much practice these last few years detecting infinitesimal changes in the Duck Crop, that a real important change like you are talking about runs clear off our ouija-boards, and climbs the nearest wall in a good year, or else writhes on the floor when the going gets awful bad. Now about this matter of keeping you informed, we are only throttle-jockeys, and we ain't running this club."

"Which is doubtless a good thing," retorts the Moderator. "Speaking of minor changes," he continues, "leave us now consider the Ordinary Crop. The kind of Duck Crop we get most of the time. Some years this crop may be a little better, some years a little worse. But, so long as the B.O.P. remains out of production, this Ordinary Crop never gets real good."

"Yet the Duck Laws have a habit of changing every year," says a Sport. "How come, if the change in the Crop ain't all that important?"

"That," replies the Moderator, "is the very thing that is causing you guys to be burned up, and is causing us to simmer somewhat. We have been beating out our brains, refining our nesting-grounds surveys so they now detect a 20% change in the annual Duck Crop. And we may eventually get so good that a 10% change will cause the lights to flash on our ouija-boards. This is mebbe a real worthy project, but we begin to wonder if improvement or impairment to the extent of a mere 20% should be just cause for panic in the Mouldy Chambers."

"Doubt it," growls the Game Agent. "Because the Duck Laws ain't all that refined that they can achieve an exact 20% change in hunting pressure."

"Along these same lines," adds a Sport, "we wonder if hunting is that refined that it will affect the population in any given year to the exact extent of 20%, no more, no less."

"Roscoe," adds an Airman. "The timing of the hatch, and subsequent weather, determine the fall distribution of ducks. And, by the same token, determine what portion of the summer Crop is going to be exposed to gun-pressure, regardless of the size of that Crop."

"What this pedantic individual means to say," interprets another Airman, "we might get an early-maturing Super-Crop next year, but a sudden early old-fashioned winter sweeps the birds south before anybody can get a crack at them. Or, we might be stuck with 'no Crop a-Tall' and a warm open winter. In which case the ducks instead of going to Mexico and such places where they might get politely peppered (figuratively and also literally), dawdle in the States where they get positively potted and permanently salted away."

"Genthemen, and also Airmen," intones the Moderator, "the facts at hand would appear to indicate that all angles of the issue have now been accorded adequate discussion. It is about time that we bring all this Yakkety-yak to a deafening halt, and conjure up some conclusions by way of concluding this conclave.... Scribe, stand by for extended traffic."

A Sport brandishes a fresh malt and shouts, "I conclude that the Duck Laws change around so fast that we can't hardly tell when we are obeying them."

"And I can't hardly tell," adds the Game Agent, "when you ain't obeying them."

"And nobody can tell whether all this intricate legislating is worth the effort in the first place. It is getting harvested the exact number of ducks that we say should be harvested that year, and also saving the correct number right down to the last spoonbill? We flat conclude that it ain't." This from an Airman.

"Be it therefore resolved," says the Moderator, "That we limit the Duck Laws to three distinct sizes, to go with the Duck Crop which comes in only three sizes.

"Be it further resolved," he continues, "that we keep an eye on the B.O.P. of the Big Duck Factory. And whenever it goes into production, and sets the stage for a Super-Crop of ducks, we drop whatever else we are doing, and hasten to the Mouldy Chambers with the news. And we will prevail upon the Great White Fathers to dust off the seldom-used Green Book of Rules and read appropriate passages therefrom to representatives of the Press. Who in turn will trumpet the glad tidings to the waiting world: 'We really got the ducks this year. Have at 'em, lads, and don't be bashful.'

"But years when things go Democrat in the Big Duck Factory, and the summer hatch amounts to No Crop a-Tall, we interrupt our fishing only long enough to send a wireless (collect) to Washington. Which will suggest that those in high places drape their office windows, wear their black ties and arm-bands, and read from the Rule Book with the somber red binding. This is the book which has nothing but dismal news from the duckhunter, and says 'you can kill a duck or two if you can find one, but we would prefer that you didn't even look.'

"But most years there will be no great need for us to interrupt our fishing, because the B.O.P. will be out of operation and not turning out any ducklings. And the other Branches of the Big Duck Factory, the B.C.F. and the B.F.F., will be grinding out the usual very ordinary Duck Crop. Occasionally this crop will be a shade better, sometimes a mite worse. But, so long as it stays within the Bracket of Mediocrity, and don't get real good or awful bad, there is no cause for wild rejoicing nor is there occasion for panic. And the Great White Fathers will distribute at the appointed time copies of the Ordinary Rule Book with the Amber label. Which provides for a standard ordinary harvest of the Standard Ordinary Crop. And which, God willing, will not be revised any more just because some years we have the odd extra duck, more or less.

"Scribe," he concludes, "rush this thing to the Presses. The International Brotherhood of Mudflatters and Mallard-Maulers even now awaits the outcome of ~~this~~ our deliberations."

We gather up our copious notes, taxi clear of obstructions such as prosprate Airmen, and start our takeoff run, holding considerable starboard aileron against the strong crosswind that seems to have arisen. Some time later we learn that Joe, the Mixologist at the Malt Bar, is putting two eggs in his specials these days. Which probably explains why we depart the Flyboys' Rehab Center that entertaining and instructive evening via the hinge end of the Swinging Doors.

JJL/Scribe
1952
Abbeville, La.