



**Smithsonian Institution**

*Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum Archives*

## **Benjamin O. Davis Jr. Collection - Official Duties, Visit to Pacific Stars and Stripes**

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JAPANESE CARDS are unique. They are small and thick and made of a very heavy cardboard. It is almost impossible to shuffle the cards "American" style, so they are shuffled "Japanese" style. The deck rests in the palm of one hand, and the thumb and middle finger of the other hand remove some of the cards out of the deck and place them on top of the pile. This operation is repeated and repeated at lightning speed. Like a small boy watches a magician pull a rabbit out of a hat, the serviceman watches the Japanese perform their shuffling magic with the cards.

Perhaps the most popular card game in Japan is hana-karuta (flower cards). It is the poker game of Japan and the ichi-ban game of Japanese gambling houses. For each month of the year there are four cards branded with a flower or a tree. January, for instance, grows four pine trees. April, the month of the cherry blossom, spotlights the cherry. October marks the maple. The game, besides providing entertainment, offers a floral education.

Another game, uta-karuta (poem cards) yields something of a literary education. This game is played only on the New Year holiday.

And before the game there's that unusual shuffle. After many hours of practice and crying over spilled cards, the serviceman also masters the shuffle. But when he gets back home and displays his mix-'em-up skill, his card partner may not applaud the Asiatic card acrobatics. Instead, he may suspect foul play.

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