



Education Support

“The First Lady of Drill Team”

Gussie Nell Davis

Kilgore, Texas

November 4, 1906-December 20, 1993

Gussie Nell Davis, of Kilgore, Texas, was born in Farmersville, Texas, November 4, 1906. She was best known for creating a "first" for Texas and the nation. In 1975, the Houston Contemporary Museum of Art honored her for creating a "living art form."

A talented musician, Miss Davis was groomed to be a concert pianist, but upon entering the College of Industrial Arts (now Texas Woman's University) in Denton, Texas, she selected physical education as her career choice. She went on to earn a master of science degree from the University of Southern California. In 1929, Miss Davis started the first dancing pep squad at Greenville High School in Greenville, Texas. Then in 1940 she was hired by Kilgore College (Kilgore, Texas) to organize a group of girls to perform at the halftimes of college football games. As a result, the world famous *Kilgore College Rangerettes* were born. During her 40 years as director of the 65 member *Rangerette* organization, the group traveled over a million miles representing the United States and Texas in South America, the Far East and other points around the world. The *Rangerettes* have been featured at numerous football bowl games across the nation, on national television, in movies and on hundreds of magazine covers.



In 1958, Miss Davis teamed with Dr. Irving Dreibrodt to start a school to teach drill teams not only routines for the field, but the importance of being ladies. Dr. Dreibrodt had written his thesis on drill teams and had stepped forward to make a difference. The first school or camp was held at Southern Methodist University and drew teams from as far away as Kansas and Iowa. Today, *American Dance/Drill Team School®* is one of the largest companies to service drill teams in the industry.

Miss Davis made many trips to Rosebud, Texas, where her sister Loraine and Loraine's daughter Betty lived. She had many special friends in Rosebud, including Betty Thrasher, who spoke of the 'special occasions' when Miss Davis came to town. Somewhat of a celebrity in Rosebud, Miss Davis was known as quite a clotheshorse. That is why she made many trips to Betty's boutique, The Rosebud in Temple, Betty outfitted Miss Davis for some of her many special appearances.

Miss Davis was inducted into the *Texas Woman's Hall of Fame* in 1990; named Honorary Citizen of Fort Worth in 1965; received the International Civitan Citizenship Award in 1969, the Cotton Bowl Association 25th Anniversary Participation Award in 1974 and a State of Texas House of Representatives Certificate of Citation; was honored as a Distinguished Alumnae of Texas Woman's University in 1978; and had a woman's dormitory at Kilgore College named for her. In January of 1996 she was named posthumously to the TDDTEA Texas Drill Team Hall of Fame. Miss Davis was most definitely the "First Lady of Drill Team." On December 20, 1993, she died in her sleep in Kilgore, Texas. She remains a hero and role model in the hearts of all of the many young women and friends whose lives she touched.

