

The Enigma of Dita Davis

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DITA DAVIS Beard is an emotional woman, ferocious in her loyalties and in her love for her five children, a blunt woman who apparently thrives in the competitive driving world of Washington politics, yet a woman who always seems to have room in her house for young waifs and wanderers.

The International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation lobbyist is a central figure in the controversy surrounding Richard Kleindienst's nomination as attorney general. A memo, reportedly written by her to her boss, linked settlement of a government antitrust case against ITT with a subsidiary firm's promise of financial aid for the Republican National Convention.

Now isolated in a Denver hospital for a heart ailment, the 53-year-old Mrs. Beard has been an enigma to the public. This portrait emerges from old news clips and interviews with her family and associates.

A Washington debutante in 1939, daughter of Colonel (later general) Robert Davis, the Kansas-born Miss Davis was called a "cosmopolite" by gushing society writers. She rode horseback, swam, hunted and played tennis, loved opera and Bach and Chanel perfume, was a crack shot and a fine dancer.

Twenty years later, separated from her second husband but determined not to seek financial help from anyone, she worked part-time or fulltime as a secretary and even ferried cars to help keep her Arlington home and support the children. She was to pay for educating all of them, includ-



DITA BEARD
An emotional woman

ing prep schools and law school, though she herself never completed high school, after a brilliant start and skipping grades almost yearly.

The children are Edwina McLane (Lane), 25, who works for the Republican National Committee; Benjamin W. (Ben), 24, a law student at Florida's Stetson University; Robert Davis (Dave), 23, a University of Virginia graduate currently visiting in Denver; Emma Lundy, 18, in Tennessee, and Cameron (Bull) 16, at a Virginia military school.

One issue in testimony before the Senate Judiciary committee was Mrs. Beard's drinking, described by her own physician as "excessive when under tension."

"She is a hard drinker," said Ben Beard, "but she has great capacity. I never heard of her getting drunk in public. She never lets go, except maybe like at a family Christmas party."

Mrs. Beard's attorney, David Fleming, said, "She's

never missed a morning meeting in her life."

A tremendously emotional woman, Mrs. Beard cries at parades and funerals alike, her son said.

"She's extremely generous and kind and believes money is to be used. She'll never be rich. (ITT sources placed her salary at about \$30,000 plus an expense account.)

The son recounted how his mother joined the Red Cross in 1941, met her first husband, fighter pilot Benjamin W. Atwood, while serving in Corsica (where she pulled airmen out of burning jeeps and planes, her attorney said), married in 1945 and divorced him in 1950 — he died in a plane crash in 1967.

Two years later she married businessman Cameron Randolph Beard, whom she divorced in 1959 after an uneven marriage that took her from Alabama to Florida to Virginia.

Patriotic and staunchly Republican (though because of the frequent moves she first registered to vote quite late in life), she got her first political post as secretary in the 1960 Nixon campaign for President.

Edward Gerrity, ITT vice president for public relations, said that Mrs. Beard, a tall, dark-haired woman, "has the vocabulary of a drill instructor in the Marines." The military image came up in comments from several other business and

Beard

political associates — "cusses like a Marine drill sergeant when upset," "talks like a man", "abrasive and unpleasant."

But other associates saw her style rather differently — "never offensive," "she can be really funny," "a robust sense of humor," "very warm and human, down to earth, with no airs."

A former congressional aide described her as "big-hearted, generous and foul-mouthed" and noted that two teen-age boys were saved from trouble with the law by "all-night talks with Dita." The aide noted, "Her shoulder has always been available for young people to lay their heads on and cry their hearts out."