

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Adams-Ender, Clara
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender,
Dates:	February 1, 2006 and September 20, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005 and 2006
Physical Description:	14 Betacame SP videocassettes (6:33:41).
Abstract:	Military officer Gen. Clara Adams-Ender (1939 -) reached the rank of Army General with the U.S. Army Nurse Corps. In the process of climbing the ranks, Adams-Ender became the first African American Nurse Corps officer to graduate from the U.S. Army War College, and the first woman to earn a Master of Military Art and Science degree at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Adams-Ender was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 1, 2006 and September 20, 2005, in Lake Ridge, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_218
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

U.S. Army General Clara Mae Leach Adams-Ender was born on July 11, 1939 in Willow Springs, North Carolina to Caretha Bell Sapp Leach and Otha Leach. Adams-Ender was the fourth child of ten and grew up in a family of sharecroppers. Adams-Ender excelled in school and went on to North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro, North Carolina, where she earned her B.S. degree in nursing in 1961.

Upon her graduation, Adams-Ender joined the U.S. Army Nurse Corps as a second lieutenant, received training at Brooke Army Medical Center in Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Adams-Ender was assigned overseas, beginning in 1963, as a staff nurse for the 121st evacuation hospital in the Pacific theater near North Korea; she would later serve in Germany. In 1964, Adams-Ender worked as a medical-surgical nursing instructor at Fort Sam Houston; in 1967, she became the first female officer to receive an Expert Medical Field Badge, whereupon she decided to return to school at the University of Minnesota.

After earning her M.S. degree from the University of Minnesota, Adams-Ender began working at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., initially as a medical-surgical nurse instructor, then as an assistant professor, until she was promoted to education coordinator in 1972. After two years as the assistant chief of the Department of Nursing at Fort Meade in Maryland, Adams-Ender entered the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; she graduated in 1976 as the first woman to earn a Master of Military Art and Science degree at the College. Adams-Ender graduated from the U.S. Army War College in 1982, the first African American Nurse Corps officer in the Army to do so.

After working as the Chief of the Department of Nursing in the 97th General Hospital, Chief of Nurse Recruiting

at Fort Sheridan, and Illinois, Chief of the Department of Nursing at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Adams-Ender was promoted to the rank of Brigadier-General and became the Chief of the Army Nurse Corps in 1987. In 1991, Adams-Ender was selected to be Commanding General, Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and served in this capacity as well as that of Deputy Commanding General of the U.S. Military District of Washington until her retirement in 1993.

Adams-Ender was known throughout her career for being active in nurse recruiting, initiating nursing units and advocating on behalf of critical care nurses for increased pay. Adams-Ender received a Distinguished Service Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, Legion of Merit award, an Arm Commendation Medal, and Meritorious Service Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters; she also received non-military awards that included the Roy Wilkins Meritorious Service Award of the NAACP, the Gertrude E. Rush Award for Leadership from the National Bar Association, and, in 1996, was named one of the 350 women who changed the world by *Working Women* magazine.

After retirement, Adams-Ender also served as the President of Caring About People With Enthusiasm (CAPE) Associates, Inc., and published her autobiography, *My Rise to the Stars: How a Sharecropper's Daughter Became an Army General*, in 2001.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender was conducted by Paul Brock on February 1, 2006 and September 20, 2005, in Lake Ridge, Virginia, and was recorded on 14 Betacame SP videocassettes. Military officer Gen. Clara Adams-Ender (1939 -) reached the rank of Army General with the U.S. Army Nurse Corps. In the process of climbing the ranks, Adams-Ender became the first African American Nurse Corps officer to graduate from the U.S. Army War College, and the first woman to earn a Master of Military Art and Science degree at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Adams-Ender, Clara

Brock, Paul (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

Adams-Ender, Clara--Interviews

African Americans--Interviews

African American nurses--Interviews

African American generals--Interviews

Military Nursing--Interviews

Medical teaching personnel--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. Army

Occupations:

Military Officer

HistoryMakers® Category:

MilitaryMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, February 1, 2006 and September 20, 2005. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Section A2005_218_001_001, TRT: 0:29:01 ?

Gen. Clara Adams-Ender was born on July 11, 1939 in Willow Spring, North Carolina to Caretha Sapp Leach and Otha Leach. Her mother was born in Jupiter, Florida to a family of sharecroppers, but they moved to North Carolina when she was a child to work as tobacco farmers. Adams-Ender's maternal grandfather, Zedekiah Sapp, became a Pullman porter, leaving the family to support themselves. Her paternal great-grandfather, Handy Leach, was given 150 acres of land after his emancipation from slavery. He divided the land among his three sons, including Adams-Ender's grandfather, Vander Leach. Adam-Ender's parents met while walking to school together as teenagers. They married young and had ten children, of which she is the fourth. Upon Vander Leach's death in 1942, he left his farm to his wife, Esther Rowland Leach, who sold it and moved to Raleigh. Adams-Ender's father, unable to purchase the property while also supporting his family, moved to Willow Spring to work as a sharecropper.

African American nurses--Interviews.

African American generals--Interviews.

Military Nursing--Interviews.

Medical teaching personnel--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Section A2005_218_001_002, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Gen. Clara Adams-Ender's father, Otha Leach, was unable to purchase the family land from his mother. Instead, he moved the family to Willow Spring, North Carolina to become sharecroppers. Two of Adams-Ender's uncles lived nearby, and she frequently spent time with her cousins, working in the fields and attending church together at both Juniper Level Missionary Baptist Church and St. Anna Free Will Baptist Church. Although they had little money, Adams-Ender's family raised their own food and never went hungry. Adams-Ender was

close to her father and enjoyed following him around the farm. Her older sister, Bettie Leach, taught her to read at age four, and she often read to her father. She skipped first grade when her teacher discovered Adams-Ender's advanced reading ability. In high school, she and her siblings learned canning and other practical skills. Adams-Ender's mother sewed the family's clothes and taught her children the same. She recalls lessons from her mother about confidence and hard work.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Section A2005_218_001_003, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Gen. Clara Adams-Ender was close to her brother Raymond Leach, and he included her in baseball games with the neighborhood boys. Her family worked as sharecroppers for Bud Lipscomb, who she remembers as kind although he often drank. Her father borrowed money from Walter Myatt, the general store owner, who dealt with him fairly. Her uncle William Leach, taught her and her siblings to recite poetry at church and public speaking. Despite resistance from her father, Adams-Ender's older sister, Bettie Leach, attended Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina, and the family often visited her. While in high school, Adams-Ender was mentored by her teacher, Mr. Haywood, and attended prom with a friend, Kelso Adams. After graduation, she followed her sister to Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina, where she studied nursing. After one year, she had to drop out to work. Upon returning, she opted to join the U.S. Army Nurse Corps.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Section A2005_218_001_004, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Gen. Clara Adams-Ender frequently missed class in high school to do farm work, yet graduated as salutatorian. After working briefly, she returned to Greensboro for her junior year at the Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina and joined the U.S. Army Nurse Corps. Her mother supported the decision, which allowed Adams-Ender to travel, although it led her to break up with her boyfriend. Her mother also helped her convince her father, who was hesitant about Adams-Ender joining the Corps, partly due to advice from a group of farmers he often met. Adams-Ender served as president of nurse student organization, TELOCA, and was active in Greensboro's Civil Rights Movement. Her parents they supported the movement but reminded Adams-Ender to study. Encouraged by Ezell Blair, Jr., Adams-Ender joined the Greensboro Four's sit-in at Woolworth's in 1960, an event she learned more about from General Joseph McNeil during a reunion. She also debated fellow student Reverend Jesse L. Jackson at Sunday school.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Section A2005_218_001_005, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Gen. Clara Adams-Ender was trained by the Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina Reserve Officers' Training Corps program. She graduated from college in 1961 and passed the state board of nursing before going on active duty. Her family obtained a delayed certificate of birth for her, as they had not filed her birth with the health department. Because of her mother's fear of planes, Adams-Ender took the train to basic training at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. She was then assigned to Fort Dix in New Jersey where she could visit her sister Bettie Leach. She served as a nurse in the surgical intensive care unit and recalls little racial tension on the base. While working on her time management, Adams-Ender decided not to stand when physicians entered the room. The chief nurse did not reprimand her although she was frequently reported as insubordinate. The reports mostly stopped after the head of surgery,

Colonel John Sharp, supported her in a conflict with a captain.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Section A2005_218_002_006, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Gen. Clara Adams-Ender was stationed at Fort Dix, New Jersey where she worked at Walson Army Hospital. There she conflicted with Colonel John Sharp over her refusal to stand for physicians, but they reconciled when he supported her diagnosis of a seizure. She and other lieutenants stationed in New Jersey frequently went dancing and enjoyed free time together. She rarely went home to North Carolina until her mother faked a serious illness to convince her that she should visit more often, and Adams-Ender promised to do so. In 1961, she was deployed to Sinchon in Seoul, South Korea. While working in the intensive care unit of 121st Evacuation Hospital, she learned about communicable diseases like hemorrhagic fever. She also volunteered, working in orphanages and teaching conversational English to Korean students, and travelled to visit soldiers further north in the country. Adams-Ender spent one year in Korea before deciding to reenlist and requesting to teach at Fort Sam Houston.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Section A2005_218_002_007, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Gen. Clara Adams-Ender was stationed in South Korea for one year before deciding to remain in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps with advice from Major Ann Cost. She began a career training course in summer of 1964 in San Antonio, Texas, which remained racially segregated. Her roommate drank heavily and struggled with the course, and Adams-Ender was asked to help her pass. Advised by longtime mentor Lillian Dunlap, Adams-Ender focused on her own studies although she tried to assist her roommate. She graduated at the top of her class and was assigned to teach medics in San Antonio in 1965. Despite initial resistance from the school's second-in-command, Lois Bailey, she and Adams-Ender worked well together. Adams-Ender enjoyed teaching her students, who had a wide range of education, and was also assigned to teach war training. Bailey was later replaced by Major Moody who disliked Adams-Ender and gave her a low rating on an officer efficiency report. Adams-Ender appealed, and the rating was eventually dismissed.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Section A2005_218_002_008, TRT: 0:28:00 ?

Gen. Clara Adams-Ender was promoted to captain in the U.S. Army Corps of Nurses in 1964 while stationed at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. Although one of her superiors, Major Moody, filed a false report claiming that Adams-Ender was stealing from the U.S. Army, her commander dismissed the report, as he knew it was not true. Adams-Ender filed to become a regular U.S. Army officer which placed her on a three-year probation. During this time, she was sent to the University of Minnesota to receive her master's degree in medical-surgical nursing. She made many friends, especially in the campus ROTC, although she struggled to adjust to the cold weather. In 1968, she was promoted to major and threw a large party to celebrate. She was taught by Marilyn Backlund and Dr. Isabel Harris, who later recommended her to teach at Walter Reed Army Institute of Nursing under Drusilla Poole upon her graduation. Although she wanted to serve in Vietnam, she was asked and advised to stay and train lieutenants.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Section A2005_218_002_009, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Gen. Clara Adams-Ender married her high school sweetheart, James Kelso Adams, in 1969. She then moved to Washington, D.C. to teach at the Walter

Reed Army Institute of Nursing. While there, she mentored many students who were struggling with their conscience over participating in the Vietnam War. In 1972, she separated from her husband who returned to North Carolina. They divorced in 1974. Her students requested that Adams-Ender join their effort to recruit African American students to the school. After Adams-Ender returned from a vacation, her mentor and U.S. Army Nurse Corps chief Lillian Dunlap assigned her to the task, along with Army nurse Hazel Johnson-Brown and retired Army nurse Margaret E. Bailey. They enlisted several Wayne State University students at the request of a woman in the nursing department. Adams-Ender worked circumvent the usual requirements to meet a tight deadline to enroll the students and, that September, eleven African Americans enrolled at Walter Reed Army Institute of Nursing.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Section A2005_218_002_010, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Gen. Clara Adams-Ender was put on the list for promotion to lieutenant colonel by Lillian Dunlap in 1974 and was promoted the following year. After five years at Walter Reed Army Institute of Nursing, she wanted to attend law school, but Dunlap and a law school dean convinced her not to do so. Instead, she worked at Fort George G. Meade for one year before her promotion in 1975. She then attended the Commander and General Staff College in Kansas. While there, she learned tactics and held a program for the seven other women attending the college in 1976. The same year, her father passed away after hesitating to receive treatment for his prostate cancer. Upon graduation, Adams-Ender returned to Fort Sam Houston to serve for two years as inspector general. She was then assigned to Frankfurt Army Regional Medical Center in Germany as assistant chief nurse, where she discovered that she was about to be promoted to colonel. Soon after, the chief nurse retired and Adams-Ender took her place.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Section A2005_218_002_011, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Gen. Clara Adams-Ender celebrated her promotion to colonel in Frankfurt. German friends catered the event for free in exchange for an introduction to General Charles Rogers. As chief nurse of the Frankfurt Army Medical Center, Adams-Ender worked to create and implement nursing standards. She met German doctor Heinz Ender and traveled with him throughout Europe while they dated. Upon her return to the United States in 1981, they were married. Adams-Ender worked for the United States Army Recruiting Command out of Chicago, Illinois, although she travelled with her husband frequently. In 1984, she was assigned to serve as chief nurse of Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where she worked until her promotion to general and chief of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps in 1987. During her career, Adams-Ender spent much of her salary helping four of her younger siblings attend college. She describes her siblings' education and working lives.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Section A2005_218_002_012, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Gen. Clara Adams-Ender prepared for her promotion to general by meeting with other high-ranking officers, including John Shannon and Max Thurman. In 1987, she was told of her promotion to chief of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps from Quinn H. Becker. The next morning, her mentor Lillian Dunlap called with the official announcement. Adams-Ender had to leave her position at Walter Reed Army Medical Center within a month and select her staff. She chose John Hudock as her assistant chief, and he returned early from vacation to accept the position, although his appointment was controversial due to his gender and

complaints from the previous chief, Connie Slewitzke. As chief of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps, Adams-Ender was head of 22,000 enlisted nurses, and she sought to maintain a strong corps despite cuts in U.S. Army personnel. With Hudock, Adams-Ender found a law that allowed them to develop a program to build up the U.S. Army Nurse Corps.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Section A2005_218_002_013, TRT: 0:27:40 ?

Gen. Clara Adams-Ender sought to build up the U.S. Army Nurse Corps while serving as its chief. Although she initially met resistance from the Army program analysis and evaluation chief, he withdrew his objections. Adams-Ender met with Carl Vuono, who gave her 125 places to be filled with the enlisted troops after the candidates completed two years of nursing school. She also led the U.S. Army Nurse Corps during the first Gulf War, working closely with U.S. Army Surgeon General Quinn H. Becker to prepare and send medics to the field. When Adams-Ender left her position, Vuono altered U.S. Army procedure to allow her to remain in the Army and hold her rank as general. She was assigned as commander of Fort Belvoir until her retirement, after which Adams-Ender traveled with her husband, Heinz Ender. He was diagnosed with cancer in 2001 and passed away in 2004. She also founded a management consulting practice. Adams-Ender reflects upon her life and recalls her closeness to her mother, who passed away in 1982.

Video Oral History Interview with Gen. Clara Adams-Ender, Section A2005_218_002_014, TRT: 0:20:40 ?

Gen. Clara Adams-Ender describes how she would like to be remembered and what changes she would like to see in the world. She concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.