

Claims Report
U.S. Army Claims Service

Claims Award Note

Career Claims Award
*Colonel R. Peter Masterton**

The Career Claims Award is bestowed each year to the top claims professional in the U.S. Army.¹ Established by The Judge Advocate General in 2009, the award recognizes claims personnel who have made significant and lasting contributions to the field of Army claims over the course of a federal career.²

The criteria for the award are demanding. Recipients must be current or former Army military or civilian claim professionals with at least twenty years of federal service. They must have at least five years of federal service working in the field of claims and be eligible for retirement or have already retired from or left the federal service. Finally, recipients must have contributed significantly to the field of claims through substantial accomplishments of lasting import.³

Nominations for the award are solicited at the beginning of each calendar year.⁴ The Judge Advocate General selects a single award winner each year, based on a recommendation from the Commander of the U.S. Army Claims Service.⁵ A plaque is maintained at the U.S. Army Claims Service to record the names of past Career Claims Award recipients.⁶ To date, three claims professionals have received the award: Mr. Joseph Rouse, Ms. Heidrun Gruetzmacher, and Ms. Mary Manderscheid.⁷

Winner of 2009 Award: Joseph Rouse

The first winner of the Career Claims Award was Mr. Joseph Rouse, the Deputy Chief of the Tort Claims Division at the U.S. Army Claims Service, Fort Meade, Maryland.

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¹ Memorandum, U.S. Army Claims Serv. Commander to The Judge Advocate Gen., U.S. Army (1 May 2009) [hereinafter Career Claims Award Memo] (on file with U.S. Army Claims Service, Fort Meade, Md.).

² *Id.* ¶ 1.

³ *Id.* ¶ 2.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.* ¶ 3.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Memorandum, U.S. Army Claims Serv. Commander, to The Judge Advocate Gen., U.S. Army, subject: United States Army Claims Service Career Claims Award (17 Mar. 2011) (on file with U.S. Army Claims Service, Fort Meade, Md.).

Mr. Rouse has been serving in the federal government for over seventy years. He started his career as a Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) cadet and led troops in combat during World War II. He later joined the Judge Advocate General's Corps and served as a judge advocate in the United States, France, and Taiwan. In 1972, he retired from the Army and joined the Army Claims Service, where he still works, as a civilian attorney.

Joe Rouse was born on 28 June 1919 in Baltimore, Maryland. He graduated from Western Maryland College in June 1941 as an ROTC cadet and entered the U.S. Army at Fort Meade in June 1941 as a second lieutenant. He served as an infantry company commander during World War II in the United States, North Africa, and Italy. In 1947 Mr. Rouse attended the University of Louisville Law School (now Brandeis School of Law) and graduated in June 1950 with a Juris Doctor.

Mr. Rouse rejoined the active Army after law school and served in France from 1951 to 1955. While in France Mr. Rouse helped establish processes to cover French claims against the U.S. Forces incurred during and after World War II. After serving in Europe, he attended the Judge Advocate Graduate Course at The Judge Advocate General's School. He also served in Taiwan and as Legal Advisor to the Army Surgeon General.

Mr. Rouse began his career at the U.S. Army Claims Service in 1965. At the request of the Department of Justice, Mr. Rouse drafted the initial Federal Tort Claims Act regulations. He also led a restructuring effort within the Army to centralize many claims processes at the Army Claims Service. Mr. Rouse retired from active duty in July 1971 as a colonel. He entered civil service in February 1972 and served as Chief, General Claims Division of the U.S. Army Claims Service, until 1987. Since then he has been the Deputy Chief of the Army Claims Service Tort Claims Division.

In the late 1970s, Mr. Rouse single-handedly changed the way the military services pay medical malpractice claims to military dependents. Keeping the Government on the cutting edge of claims settlement practice, Mr. Rouse ended the practice of paying claims by means of lump sum payments and set up structured settlements using Government-funded trusts. The trusts allowed the Government to meet the special needs of claimants and guaranteed that funds would directly benefit claimants.

Winner of 2010 Award: Heidrun Gruetzmacher

The winner of the Career Claims Award in 2010 was Heidrun (Heidi) Gruetzmacher, who served as a Supervisory Claims Examiner in Germany from 1988 until her retirement in 2008. During her thirty-five year federal career, she earned a reputation as one of the best supervisory claims professionals in the Army.

Ms. Gruetzmacher was born on 30 December 1947 in Guben, Germany (formerly East Germany). She escaped East Germany with her parents in 1957 and moved to Kassel, Germany. Ms. Gruetzmacher began her career with the U.S. Government as a clerk in the Transportation Office for the Army and later the Air Force from 1971 to 1974 in Kassel.

Ms. Gruetzmacher moved to Bad Kreuznach, Germany, in 1974. She began her career with the Office of the Staff Judge Advocate, 8th Infantry Division (Mechanized) in Bad Kreuznach in November 1976. She started as a legal clerk for the International Law Division. She was promoted to interpreter in 1978, to legal technician in 1981, and to legal assistant in 1984. While working in the International Law Office, she was selected as Bad Kreuznach's outstanding local national female employee.

In August 1988, Ms. Gruetzmacher was selected as the Supervisory Claims Examiner for the 8th Infantry Division (Mechanized). In 1991, her office was transferred to the 1st Armored Division. In 2001, her office moved from Bad Kreuznach to Wiesbaden, Germany, and merged with the V Corps Office of the Staff Judge Advocate. As a result, her office and responsibilities became much larger. She supervised claims operations in her own office and at the Baumholder Branch Office. Under Ms. Gruetzmacher's leadership, her office won The Judge Advocate General's Award for Excellence in Claims seven times. She repeatedly served as an instructor at the annual European Claims Conference and claims conferences in the United States. She also assisted the U.S. Army Claims Service with the fielding of several new computer claims programs, including the Personnel Claims Management System. Her awards include the Meritorious Civilian Service Award. Ms. Gruetzmacher retired in March 2008 with over thirty-five years of dedicated service.

Winner of 2011 Award: Mary Manderscheid

The winner of the 2011 Career Claims Award is Ms. Mary Manderscheid, the Paralegal Claims Specialist at Fort Leavenworth. In her thirty-five year federal career, Ms. Manderscheid has been recognized as one of the preeminent claims professionals in the world.

Ms. Manderscheid began working for the United States in 1976. She worked for the Fort Leavenworth Transportation Office for six years before being assigned to the claims office in 1982. She initially served as a claims

examiner at Fort Leavenworth from 1982 until 1993, processing tort claims, personnel claims, and carrier recoveries. She was promoted to lead claims examiner in 1993. In that position she was responsible for oversight of personnel claims and carrier recovery actions processed at Fort Leavenworth and the claims office at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. In 2006, Ms. Manderscheid was again promoted to become the Paralegal Claims Specialist at Fort Leavenworth. Between 1982 and 2006, she adjudicated or supervised the processing of over 18,000 personnel claims. Her diligence and tenacity resulted in the recovery of a remarkable \$7,925,000 from commercial carriers.

Under Ms. Manderscheid's leadership, the Fort Leavenworth Claims Office won the Judge Advocate General's Award for Excellence in Claims nearly every year it has been offered. She was recognized as employee of the year at Fort Leavenworth in 1993. In 1997 she received the Commander's Award for Civilian Service from the U.S. Army Claims Service for her assistance in designing a new personnel claims computer program. Because of her superb mastery of personnel claims, she was repeatedly selected as a facilitator at claims training conferences. She was also selected by the U.S. Army Claims Service to conduct claims assistance visits to other installations. In 2010, she was recognized again by the U.S. Army Claims Service for her service on a "tiger team" to assist another field office with affirmative claims. Throughout her twenty-nine years of service in the field of claims, Ms. Manderscheid devoted her talents to Soldiers, their Families, and the U.S. Army.

Conclusion

The Career Claims Award encourages Army claims professionals to strive for excellence. It also honors those who have made lasting contributions in their field.⁸ Staff judge advocates and chiefs of Army claims offices are encouraged to nominate outstanding claims professionals for this prestigious award.

⁸ Career Claims Award Memo, *supra* note 1, ¶ 1.