**Benefits Taxonomy Conversation Guide**

**Main Interview**

**Warm-Up**

1. For how long have you been out of active duty military? Well I left the military in 69 so you know that is it in a nutshell then worked in civilian life then retired in 2006.
2. Where, geographically, are you based right now? Well my home is in MI but I am currently in FL to stay out of the cold. MI: urban, its kind of like a developed area it use to be a farming area then after the Korean war they built it up and filled in the empty stays. FL: Well I would say rural. Theres plantations here commercial farming and cattle ranches. Although Seabreeze is known about the races and I am just outside of that area.
3. Can you tell me about a time you’ve utilized a VA service? Well I guess early on I took advantage I was a high school dropout and it didn’t take me long to realize I needed to do more. I was a high school truck driver, always on the road or couldn’t meet school schedules. I didn’t get that done until I came home. I used the va benefit to finish it, only took a few months and I went back to my High school. That was before they offered computers in 1970s. it wasn’t until later I signed up for healthcare and then the applications I had an email address and I signed up. they are encouraging or routing me, they didn’t let me use the mail it was responding to the email. Their encouragement in that direction is why I used them.
4. Every used home loan or anything like that: I did when I bought my first house it was a VA loan. Not really knowing much about credit it was a benefit to use and they plugged me into that.
5. Are you familiar with VA.gov, and if so, what do you typically use it for? Yes I use my benefits or ebenefits, whichever is the medical portion.
6. Used the most: yes, I guess because at least once a year I schedule an appointment but they email me and then call me and then send a card. I guess it’s needed because other veteran are hard to contact so they use each system.

**Scenario 2 - Search Page Evaluation**

Hard questions and need help, how would you find it: Because of covid its like they locked down the hospital and limited the services. My primary care scheduled video appointments and I did that one time. The following appointments as face to face and she asked for some test results from my civilian doctor. I had to get that infomraiton and sent it using secure messaging. She put it within the va medical reports then.

Last time you went in person for non-healthcare benefits: Uh I can’t say I have used anything other than. I filed a claim but that was at the hospital as well. I don’t know if that qualified. Its pretty much just using it for medical benefits like covid shots, flu shot and the shingles shot.

VA home loan benefits, issues with that and need help: Well I guess we had an agent helping us when purchasing and she knew how to do it more than I do. They put an x and I signed it. they filled it out and submitted it. We were able to purchase it and I didn’t need the experience. Even though she wasn’t the veteran she knew how to handle it due to her position.

VA location finder, using tool: I guess I haven’t used it before because I live outside of Detroit so I have two VA hospitals in my area. I pretty much know where they are, both are new by VA standards. I don’t have a hospital but I go to the VA clinic, its not a hospital because that would be in Tampa and I am 2 hours away but here I have clinics. They are showing here, yeah Sebring is the closest one to me and that’s where I got my covid booster shot, we had two shots in MI then traveled down here when it got cold so we got the booster down here.

Locations are familiar: yeah I know the Sebring VA clinic, Okeechobee is a bit away but I haven’t been there because the other is close. The main hospital if I needed anything more serious would be in the Tampa area.

How to use this if you are looking for the benefits: well I think I could go to (reading page) I used the clinic, not the vet center but the team meetings they’d have for the vets, the VA and vet centers are separate even though the activities are similar. They are veterans with PTSD and then the team meetings I attend a vet center in MI but not here because basically its difficult, well let me look now that I say that. Okay Lakeland is a bit of a hike, Melbourne is on the Atlantic coast. When it comes to a vet center I don’t have one close but I did sign up for the VA version of vet center meetings. I utilize that for at least one season but since covid I do my vet center meetings with MI using teams so I am still in contact with them.

How is that for you: Well it works I have to admit but its not the same. I cant have the donuts with the guys which is a bummer. Not everyone in our group warmed up to it. most of them tried it once but filtered out. out of 20 guys you might have 6 that are regular then 1 or 2 that might pop in.

How often do you meet: yeah its twice a week. The coordinator will send out the notice with link. It is up to the individual veteran to login.

What do you think about the va benefits one: That would be like I mentioned earlier like filing a claim and I have a VSO handling that. So I guess I assume he would be stuck in there some place. Oh wait, it is showing a map here.

What are you seeing here: it is telling me to move the map but I don’t see any VA benefit locations. You might need to talk to the governor. I don’t see any that are highlighted here at least in FL. I know where to go in MI I go downtown Detroit and I go to the federal building. That’s where my VSO is, that’s there location in the federal building. I know theres other VA guys in there, I played baseball with guys that took a job with the VA, they weren’t VSOs but they handled claims and processed infomraiton for the veterans.

Last time you worked with the VSO: It was last year so 2021 I spoke with them but didn’t see them due to the restrictions when entering the building so I called then sent the information. That was the last time it was the summer like July or August of 2021.

Which benefit: well because my claim is in the appeal process the VA sent a notice on how to follow the progression and it said that the file wasn’t there so I had to call the guy and ask how it would be completed if it weren’t where you can view it. he told me because my claim was in the 200-300K claims being reviewed mine is coming to the top so they pull it out to review and its not there for me to see. If its up for review they don’t want to run around trying to find it and add to it prior to it. I guess that’s reasonable but I don’t understand it. I don’t think it is for the veteran to understand. Well its wrote in such a way it fits the VA workforces so they understand it, tis like a computer program that they such then the next computer programmer uses a different process but gets the same end result. Its like reading a hospital bill they don’t want you to know there are codes and stuff so when I call and say the code isnt useful. It has to be in language I understand.

Going back to the VSO, working with the appeals, before that: I would see him more before covid because we were more active and I had more appointments. The va would send me documents and they don’t make sense to me some of it isnt more then a confirmation that they did this and I didn’t need action so I would call and ask. He doesn’t have just me he had a bunch of people then he needs to look it up. He doesn’t review everything he files it. He looks at it and tells me he has it covered

Anyone else you reach out to: Well its kind of funny for the longest time I didn’t bother with the VA unless I needed to. When I come out of the military there were a lot coming out. So its like jail house lawyers in the workplace and it doesn’t always fit the next veteran. I was reluctant to stick my neck out or ask for something. It wasn’t until later in life when I was in closer contact with people I thought and experience in what they were talking about.

Explain jail house lawyer piece: well these people are in the workplace, I would in an auto factor. A lot of them were returning servicemen with different experiences telling you what kind of benefit or help. In many cases because the auto industry gave use good medical benefits I didn’t use the VA. I had BlueCross BlueShield; it was top of the line. I was lucky guy that I didn’t get wounded so I didn’t need to go to the VA. You know if I medical help i would use my insurance. The VSO told me that in MI because benefits packages aren’t as good now but we didn’t use VA as much as other areas like down south that didn’t have the same industries paying health insurance so they used it more than I.

Looping back to va finder: Yeah I would be humping. Palm beach isnt the closest it would be G although I see C at Cape coral, we go that way to Costco. We go there a few times to load up on junk for the freezer and stuff. That would be a place I could go. We have a friend that lives in that area. She’s at fort Myers beach so we go through there.

Location familiar: I have never used it and didn’t know it was there. It would be in that area because it’s the fort Meyer veteran readiness and employment office. it says they’re closed. Its good to know there something there because otherwise I would need to go to G

Reason you would need to go: Ah, well my understanding I have lived it yet but since I am in FL an appeals case would be a video conference you don’t know where the judge would be so I would need to go to one of the facilities I don’t think they want you on a personal computer. They said you’d go to a va location so that would be one of the reasons. My age I don’t think I will be using education benefits. Most other things like we are doing now we do it online. To get preapproved for burial benefits I wanted to do it in advance. They allow it but its stuck someone I did it 6 months ago, I have a lot of time here so I might have to contact them. They are a bit slow and may be backed logged but are we dying that fast

How did you start the process: well, there is a group of lawyers that specialize in veteran claims and once a year they hold a veteran summit in different locations. They try to get as many new people to attend and it is informative. There are people form the hospitals, like to tell you to get the doctors assistance . a lot like the judge that makes the decisions but the clerk knows all of the details so you could contact them instead. Those types of pointers. A lot of the guys are bitchy old men that complain so they told him how to get around it and to go to an advocate to get to the right people. I didn’t know anything about them until she said it, it is through the va the lawyer just provides the opportunity to bring people together. Its not a VSO because you don’t pay VSOs. I am sure you need to pay the lawyer but they are knowledgeable because the leaders wife was a Col in the military so she is well versed in VA as a post solider. Then she’s a veteran as well so she knows both sides, active duty, and veteran side so it was enlightening. There was a Vso there from the county over and I had to ask a question because I was a commander at the VFW post and I attended to the meetings. Then the cemetery coordinator explained how it was and you can get preregistered instead of waiting for my passing and to do the work ahead of time. He called it the Vietnam veteran provision. He had 5 wives buried with him. I reported back after the conference and they have a Vietnam veterans, I had a lot of WWII veterans mock me. I asked them to verify it and they didn’t say it is a policy but they can say there are presence. I felt like if the organization thought I needed to go to the training that I needed to comeback with the report but some guys go and just go to the hospitality suits. They need to know; it doesn’t do me well.

Labels, thoughts: Applying for benefits would be pretty good. To be honest with you when I applied when I went back to high school they paid me to go back. It was the VA worker and he filled it out for me, they told me if I took another class I would get a half time dollar benefit. I took the class. I got a cash benefit for going to school. I can remember when I was leaving they told us we could get this from VA. When I was leaving we were flying all night so it went over my head

Burial claims help I will use because I need to bust them a bit because its been 6 months. 54 years married to the same wife.

Disability claims, again I had to go through my jail house lawyers that had experiences. Some of it is gossip and you have to sort through what’s real and not

Education/career to late for me

Most of these are good. Va sends a quarterly or monthly thing that says to look this up like burial benefits. That’s how I started it. I don’t know how to say it, maybe they need the emphasize it in my case. It ahs to attract me. like the advertisements for medications that say you may lose some weight. The weight loss has no purpose of the medication. At my vet center meetings a lot of them don’t want to get the covid shot btu if you told them you get a 5 hour erection they would be there. It would trigger them to go get it.

Labels make sense: yes like they have va loan help I could’ve used it then.

Click on burial claim help and search: That dot is representing my location. I know we have a military burial someplace here but I cant remember where. I don’t see it.

**Closing**

Thank you so much for your time and for your help today!

* Did you have any questions for the team? Uh well, I just want to mention that when I wanted to use the video medical appointment they offer the system then have a test to see if I can see them and they see me it wouldn’t come up so I had to contact them. They tried to walk me through it and asked if I had Chrome on the computer, it effects the thing and I needed to get it off. I needed Chrome to do this or it is recommended but no one helped me get that system to work for me. I could not use the video but used audio so I was a bit disappointed that they dropped me. The technical stuff I get lost, someone has to fix it for me and fi they found out what my issues was then I cant be the only one so they would fix a lot of peoples problem. They could’ve came back to it, like if you wait too long on hold they offer a call back,. Even if it’s a week later lets schedule to get it fixed, those onesies would be a lot of people with the same issue.