**781 Interview**

**Participant #2, 8/28/2018**

Male.

1.    Tell me a little about your military service. In which branch of the military did you serve and when? U.S. Army, 2006-2013.

2.    What VA Benefits have you applied for in the past? Medical (pre-separation); PTSD

Worked with the VSO to streamline a bunch of stuff. They had a lot of good advice. I told my friends, "If you're lucky when you leave you have a good VSO." A lot of my friends were not as lucky.

3.    Have you applied for PTSD disability benefits? Yes.

4.    How would you rate your comfort level and experience with technology? Very. I'm a network engineer by trade.

5.    Which of the following three age brackets best categorizes your age:

31-50

6.    Where you live, if you are comfortable sharing (State, City optional)? Aurora, CO

**Overall Experience**

1.    What did you think about the overall process of applying for PTSD benefits?

2.    Do you remember whether you completed Form 0781 or 0781a? Combat.

3.    Please walk me through the process you used to gather information and submit your claim.   
What really helped build the case, is during my service the unit I was in &/or the base I was stationed at had processes built in and people would fill in questionnaires and process. When I was separating, I was told I was "caught hot" or had enough numbers that I should be tested for PTSD. I was one of the last waves of people leaving with like 20lbs of paper with medical records. I still have that hard copy - it's monstrous. There was some sort of exit process. There were a bunch of questions. When I got out, they told me to go to the VA hospital. I forget how I got to the VSO, exactly, but it was down the road from my house. MA had some sort of thing that I got some money after coming home. A very good source of information, if your VSO is squared away.

c.     What was it like to fill out the questions?   
It was just another standard Army form. You just follow the instructions on the form.

d.    How long did it take to fill out the form?   
Like 15 minutes. I don't remember if I'd already done the form. I went to the VA Hospital. Based on some sort of list, they went and scheduled a whole bunch of appointments and I was seen for a bunch of things. I was given the paperwork and filled out as much as I could. Probably would have been easier to do it on a computer but that wasn't an option. It would be easier: would be easier to read; would have more space for answers.

4.    Did you include one or more buddy statements or lay statements   
Not to my recollection.

**Impressions**

5.         What part of the claim submission process went smoothly?   
There wasn't any hiccup. It caught me off-guard when they wrapped up the evaluation.

6.         What challenges did you face as you completed the claim process?   
The only thing that would have been helpful - with any aspect of the VA medical system - if the soldier doesn't know where they are in the process, having a tracker that shows where they are would be helpful. If they had that, I didn't know.

7.         What thoughts did you have and what feelings did you experience as you went through each step of the claim process?

a.    As you considered applying for the benefit   
The injuries were already in the system so I didn't have to fill out any forms related to that.

8.         Have you submitted other disability claim applications? If so, were there any differences between applying for other claims and applying for PTSD claims?

**Opportunities for Improvement**

9.         What recommendations do you have for improvements to either the PTSD claim process or the PTSD form?   
Without seeing those forms (the old one or new one) [ can’t recall ]

10.     Do you remember feeling that there were any questions or sections on the form that needed more explanation or clarification?   
The lack of example or detailed explanation on anything I would have had a question on so I just put as much information as I could.

*Looks like we have 5-10 minutes left, so I want to pause and give my colleagues on the phone an opportunity to ask any questions they may have.*

[Additional questions from any observers on the phone]   
*What advice would you give?*   
There's the instructions on the sheet but there's no one to give you advice. So you just write every single detail - that's what I did. I expect you'll have an example on the site. Maybe it was a little daunting. Not the whole thing but the format of how you should be answering the response. Yeah, that was a little difficult. It's not comfortable and you're reliving that experience. As time passes, things get greyer but some things don't go away. Probably going to be disturbing to some people. You probably spent a lot of time trying to forget it. I don't think you can avoid asking that. Maybe an upfront disclaimer "The following request might be disturbing and will ask you to think about the past. While filling out the form you may revisit difficult time." There's no way to soften the blow, you don't want to omit anything. There's a bunch of nasty stuff but if you don't want it to not be approved, there's no way around it.

*Do you have any questions for us?*   
I've seen a lot of emails… I keep getting random emails - like 30 of them. "You just got out of the Army and you need to do all these things." Oncer or twice a year I'll get a whole bunch of them. A request… if you're tied into the database, you could do a better job of tracking people's actual exit time. I'm getting info that would have been helpful years ago.