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AN EXTENDED GUIDE · NO. 1945

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Proving you're a veteran online (ID.me)

An Extended Guide · No. 1945 · VETERANS

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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1 What 'proving you're a veteran' online means

More and more of the good things that come with having served — health benefits, retailer discounts, special offers, and access to government services — now ask you to prove you are a veteran through a website rather than by showing a card at a counter. For a lot of people who served decades ago, that is a strange new hoop to jump through, and it can feel like the proof you carried in your wallet for years suddenly is not enough.

This guide walks you through it calmly, start to finish.

The heart of it is a one-time identity check through a service called ID.me, and sometimes an alternative run by the government called Login.gov. Once you have verified who you are — and, separately, that you served — that verification sticks, and you can use it again and again without repeating the whole process. The hardest part is simply the first setup, and that is exactly what we will take slowly together here.

You do not need to be a computer expert to do this. You need a little patience, a photo ID, and about half an hour of quiet time. If any step feels like too much, it is the kind of thing a trusted family member or I can sit beside you for — but most veterans, taken one step at a time, get through it just fine on their own.

It is worth naming the frustration plainly, because a lot of veterans feel it and think they are alone. You served, you have the card, you have the discharge papers in a drawer — and now a website is asking you to prove all over again something you proved long ago with your body and your years.

That can feel like an insult rather than a formality. It is not meant that way, and understanding what the step is actually for, which the next chapters explain, takes most of the sting out of it. The system is clumsy, not disrespectful.

2 Why the proof moved online

It helps to understand why this changed, because it makes the process feel less arbitrary. For years, different agencies and companies each had their own way of checking whether someone really was a veteran, and much of it was slow, paper-based, and easy to fake with a photocopied card. As benefits and discounts moved onto the internet, there needed to be a single, trustworthy way to confirm both that you are who you say you are and that your service record is real.

That is the job ID.me and Login.gov do. They are identity-verification services — a kind of digital notary — that check your identity once, securely, and then vouch for you to any website that trusts them. The Department of Veterans Affairs uses them to protect your benefits from fraud, and many retailers use ID.me to confirm military and veteran status before giving a discount, so the honest get the deal and the dishonest do not.

So while it is one more step, it exists to protect you — to make sure a stranger cannot log in as you and raid your VA benefits, and to make sure the veteran discount really goes to veterans. Once you see it as a lock on your own front door rather than a bureaucratic obstacle, the small effort of setting it up makes a lot more sense.

3 The big change to VA sign-in you should know about

If your main reason for proving veteran status is to reach your VA benefits online, there is an important recent change to know. The VA has retired its older sign-in methods and now requires everyone to use one of just two accounts: ID.me or Login.gov. The old DS Logon was turned off at the end of September 2025, and the older My HealtheVet username-and-password sign-in was retired earlier that year. If you have not signed in to VA.gov in a while, your old login simply will not work anymore.

This is not a cause for alarm — it is a one-time switch, and once you have set up either ID.me or Login.gov, the same account gets you into VA.gov, the VA: Health and Benefits mobile app, My HealtheVet, and your other VA services. You pick whichever of the two you prefer; both are free, both are secure, and you only need one.

The rest of this guide leans on ID.me because it doubles as your proof for retailer discounts, but Login.gov is an equally valid choice for VA access alone.

> **WATCH OUT**
> If your old VA login stopped working, you have not lost your benefits or your records — you simply need to create an ID.me or Login.gov account and link it. Everything is still there waiting once you sign in the new way.

A great many veterans discover this change at the worst possible moment — when they sit down to check a claim, refill a prescription, or look at an appointment, and the login they have used for years is simply rejected. If that has happened to you, take a breath: nothing is wrong with your account, your benefits, or your standing.

The VA deliberately turned off the old doors and opened two new ones, and all your information moved through with you. You just need a key to one of the new doors, and making that key is a one-time, free, half-hour job.

4 ID.me and Login.gov — which to choose

Since you only need one account, it is worth a moment to choose well. The two services do the same core job — proving you are really you — but they differ in a couple of ways that may matter to you.

ID.me is the one most retailers use to confirm military and veteran status for discounts, so if you want that verified-veteran badge for shopping as well as VA access, ID.me handles both jobs with one account. It verifies you either through a video call with a person or by uploading photos of your ID. Login.gov is run by the

federal government itself, is used across many government agencies beyond the VA, and offers identity verification in person at participating post offices — a nice option if you would rather hand your ID to a clerk than deal with a webcam.

If you want...	Lean toward
VA access AND verified-veteran retail discounts	ID.me
Just VA and other government sites	Either — Login.gov is a clean choice
To verify in person rather than by webcam	Login.gov (at a post office)
To verify by video call or uploaded photos	ID.me

> **TIP**
> There is no wrong choice, and you are not locked in forever. If one gives you trouble, you can set up the other. For most veterans who also like a good discount, ID.me is the single account that covers the most ground.

5 What you'll need before you start

A few minutes of gathering the right things beforehand makes the whole process smooth, so you are not scrambling mid-setup. None of it is exotic — it is the ordinary proof of identity you already own.

- A government photo ID — a driver's license, state ID, or passport.
- Your Social Security number.
- A phone that can receive a text message, for the security codes.
- An email address you can check (if you do not have one, that is worth setting up first).
- For the video or photo step: a smartphone with a camera, or a computer with a webcam.

- If verifying veteran status for discounts, ID.me can often confirm your service automatically — but having your discharge paperwork (your DD-214) nearby does no harm if it asks.

Set aside a calm half hour and a quiet spot with decent lighting, since part of the process involves photographing your ID and sometimes your own face. Rushing is the main thing that makes these steps go sideways, so give yourself the time to go slowly and read each screen. There is no clock and no penalty for taking your time.

> Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

6 Setting up ID.me, step by step

Here is the whole ID.me setup from the beginning. You can do it on a phone or a computer; a smartphone is often easiest because its camera handles the photo steps smoothly.

1. Go to the site where you want to use it — for VA, start at VA.gov and choose 'Create an account with ID.me.' For a store discount, you will usually see an 'ID.me' or 'Verify with ID.me' button at checkout.
2. Create your ID.me account with your email and a strong password you write down.
3. Set up the security code step (ID.me texts a code to your phone each time you sign in — this is the good kind of extra protection).
4. When asked to verify your identity, choose the method you prefer: upload photos of your ID, or join a short video call with an ID.me agent.
5. Follow the prompts to photograph your ID and, if asked, your face, in good light.
6. To add your veteran status, let ID.me check your service records; approve the check and, if needed, provide the details it requests.

GOOD TO KNOW

The video-call option exists precisely for people whose ID photos won't verify automatically, or who would simply rather talk to a human. There is sometimes a short wait for an agent, but the person walks you through it kindly — it is not an interrogation, just a friendly confirmation that you are you.

7 Keeping your account safe

Because this account is the key to your VA benefits and your verified identity, it is worth the small effort to lock it down properly from the start — and the good news is the services nudge you toward doing exactly that. The two essentials are a strong, unique password and the text-message security code (two-factor sign-in), both of which you set during setup.

Use a long passphrase you do not use anywhere else, and write it down somewhere safe at home. Keep the phone number for your security codes current, so you never get locked out when a code is sent. If the service offers backup codes — a short printed list to use if your phone is unavailable — save those on paper too. These few habits mean that even if someone learned your password, they still could not get into the account that protects your benefits.

WATCH OUT

No one from the VA, ID.me, or Login.gov will ever call, text, or email you asking for your password or your security code. Those codes are for you to type into the real website only. Anyone who phones asking you to read them a code is a scammer — hang up.

8 Using your verified status for discounts

Once your veteran status is confirmed with ID.me, a pleasant world of discounts opens up, and using it is easy. Many retailers — clothing stores, home-improvement chains, travel sites, phone carriers, and more — offer a standing veteran or military discount, and they use that same ID.me verification you already set up to confirm you qualify.

At an online checkout, you will typically see a 'Military & Veteran discount — verify with ID.me' option. You click it, sign in to ID.me (entering your security code), and it quietly confirms your status back to the store, which applies the discount. You do not have to upload anything again or prove yourself from scratch; the one-time verification does the work. In a physical store, some chains let you show a verified digital card in the ID.me app or a code on your phone.

WATCH OUT

Before any larger purchase, it is worth a quick search for whether that retailer offers a veteran discount through ID.me — many do but do not advertise it loudly. A couple of minutes can save a meaningful amount, and you have already done the hard setup work.

9 If the automatic check can't confirm your service

Sometimes the system cannot automatically confirm your service — this is more common for those who served long ago, whose records may be older or incomplete in the databases these services check. It is not a judgment on your service, and it does not mean you are out of luck. It simply means you take an extra step to prove it by hand.

In that case, ID.me will offer a way to upload supporting documents, and the single most useful one is your DD-214, the discharge paperwork that records your service.

A clear photo or scan of it, uploaded when prompted, lets a reviewer confirm your status manually, usually within a day or two. If you cannot find your DD-214, the National Archives can provide a copy — a separate guide covers requesting military records online, which is worth reading if your paperwork has gone missing over the years.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Do not give up if the automatic check fails. The manual document route is built in for exactly this situation, and plenty of veterans — especially those who served decades ago — go through it and come out verified. Patience, not technical skill, is what it takes.

10 Scams that target this process

Any process that involves veterans, benefits, and personal documents attracts scammers, and the setup process is no exception. Knowing the shapes of these schemes keeps your identity and your benefits safe. The common thread, as always, is someone reaching out to you unexpectedly and creating pressure to hand over information or money.

- A call or email claiming to be 'VA support' or 'ID.me support' offering to 'help you verify' — real support does not call you first asking for your login.
- A site that looks like ID.me or VA.gov but has a slightly wrong web address — always start from VA.gov or ID.me directly, never from a link in an email or text.
- Anyone asking for your password or the security code texted to your phone — never share these.
- A 'service' that offers to get your benefits or discounts for a fee — verification is free, and no middleman is needed.

The safe habit is simple: you reach out to them, never the other way around. When you want to verify, you go to VA.gov or ID.me yourself by typing the address, and you ignore and delete unsolicited messages that claim to be from these services. Legitimate verification never begins with a stranger contacting you out of the blue.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

11 Common worries, answered plainly

The questions veterans ask me most when we sit down to do this.

Is it safe to send photos of my ID to ID.me?

Yes — that is the service's entire purpose, and it protects the images. The real risk is fake sites, so always start from VA.gov or ID.me directly, not from an emailed link.

I verified years ago — do I have to do it again?

Not the full identity check. But if your VA login was an old DS Logon or My HealtheVet username, those are retired, so you will need to create an ID.me or Login.gov account once.

I don't have a smartphone or webcam.

Login.gov lets you verify in person at a participating post office, which is a good option without a camera. ID.me also has ways to help — and this is a fine thing to have a family member or me assist with.

The system says it can't confirm my service.

Upload your DD-214 when it offers the document option. If you cannot find it, request a copy from the National Archives first.

12 A calm plan to get verified this week

Spread over two short sessions, this is very manageable, and once it is done it stays done.

1. Session one: gather your photo ID, Social Security number, phone, and email. Decide between ID.me (also gets you retail discounts) and Login.gov (government in-person option).
2. Session two: create the account, set the password and text-code security, and complete the identity verification (photos or video, or in person at a post office for Login.gov).
3. Add your veteran status if using ID.me; upload your DD-214 if the automatic check cannot confirm it.
4. Sign in to VA.gov with your new account to confirm it reaches your benefits — and enjoy your verified status for discounts going forward.

That is the whole thing. The setup is the only hard part, and it is a one-time effort; from then on, proving you are a veteran online is a matter of signing in and typing a code. For a lifetime of benefits and discounts earned through service, a single quiet half hour is a fair price — and you never have to do it from scratch again.

> *The hard part is the first setup. Do it once, calmly, and proving your service online becomes as simple as signing in.*

13 Why one verification now opens so many doors

There is a genuine convenience hiding inside this one-time chore, and it is worth appreciating because it makes the effort feel worthwhile rather than merely imposed. In the old days, every agency and every store checked your identity and your service in its own separate way, which meant proving yourself over and over, differently each time, and keeping track of a drawer full of logins.

The new approach flips that: you verify once, thoroughly, with a single trusted service, and then that one verification vouches for you everywhere it is accepted.

Think of it like a trusted friend who happens to know everyone in town. Once that friend is sure of who you are, they can walk you into any door and say 'this person is exactly who they claim, and yes, they served' — and you are waved through without repeating your whole story. Your ID.me or Login.gov account is that friend.

The half hour you spend convincing it of your identity pays itself back every single time you reach your VA benefits, claim a discount, or sign in to a government service, for years to come.

Seen that way, the setup is not one more thing the modern world is making you do; it is a single investment that quietly retires a dozen smaller hassles. Veterans who grumble through the setup almost always come out the other side glad to have one secure key that fits so many locks, instead of a ring full of forgotten passwords.

14 Going at your own pace, and getting help

If there is one thing to carry away from this guide, it is that there is no rush and no shame in finding this hard. These identity systems were built by young engineers for a world of smartphones, and they do not always make allowances for someone who would rather take their time, read every screen twice, and not be hurried by a webcam countdown. Your caution is wisdom, not slowness, and the process rewards those who go carefully far more than those who click fast.

So give yourself permission to do this in pieces. Set up the account one afternoon and leave the verification for another. Stop and make a cup of coffee if a step frustrates you.

If a video-call agent is involved, remember they do this all day and have seen every kind of hesitation — it is entirely fine to say 'please slow down, I want to get this right.' None of this is a test you can fail; it is a form you are filling out, and the form

will wait for you.

And if it truly becomes too much, leaning on another person is the sensible move, not a defeat. A trusted adult child, a friend who is comfortable with computers, or I can sit beside you and handle the fiddly parts while you provide the documents and the decisions. The goal is simply to get you verified and into your benefits; how you get there, and who sits with you while you do, matters not at all.

15 Your visit — and my promise

Getting verified with ID.me or Login.gov and back into your VA benefits online is exactly the kind of thing I am glad to sit down and work through with you, step by step, at your kitchen table. We can choose the right service for you, create the account, set it up securely, handle the photo or video verification, upload your DD-214 if the automatic check comes up short, and confirm you can reach your VA benefits — all at a calm pace, with no jargon and no rushing.

My promise is simple: I will treat your service and your patience with respect, never make you feel foolish for finding this confusing, and leave you with an account you understand and can use on your own.

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech. Phone or text (330) 200-8042. Email bill@billshometech.com. Based in Atwater, Ohio, serving all of Portage County. Monday–Friday, 9 AM–5 PM (closed weekends); Sophie answers day or night.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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