

George Edward Wahlen was born on August 8, 1924 in Ogden, Utah. At the beginning of the war, he worked as an aircraft mechanic for the Army Air Corp at Hill Field, Utah. At the young age of 17, he managed a crew of five mechanics. His father refused to sign the enlistment papers, so George waited until his 18th birthday before volunteering for the draft.

He had hoped to enlist in the Air Corps and continue to work on airplanes, but due to enlistment quotas, he joined the Navy, reasoning he could work on Navy planes just as well. But after basic training, he was assigned to the hospital corps. Fearing he would spend the remainder of the war emptying bedpans, he volunteered for combat duty with the Marine Corps. He was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 26th Regiment, 5th Marine Division, and trained for over a year alongside his Marine comrades. On February 19, 1945, he was among the invasion force that landed on Iwo Jima. During 12 days on the island, he was injured three times before being evacuated. After many documented heroic deeds, he was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Harry S. Truman.



After the war, he married Melba Holley, and then earned an associate degree from Weber College in Ogden, Utah and his bachelor's degree from Church College of Hawaii. He quickly became weary of the demands of being a national war hero, so he chose to enlist in the Army in order to lessen the speaking and appearance requests. He served during both the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. After 21-years active duty, he retired with the rank of Major. As a civilian he worked for over a decade with the Veteran's Administration.

From the beginning of World War II until today, 842 men have received the Medal of Honor. Today, only 72 survive. George Wahlen is the only Medal of Honor recipient to have served in four branches of the military, and to have served active duty in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. He was also awarded three Purple Hearts.