

**Chris Harris**  
Vice President – *Family and Friends of the 508th PIR Association*  
+1 310 729 2745 · harris.chris.j@att.net  
**www.508PIR.org**

**Funeral Service for PVT Eugene J. “Gene” Appleby**  
**Thursday, 22 June 2017**  
**Coshocton, Ohio**

Thank you. Given this most special occasion and, frankly, the emotions so many of us feel, I decided it best to write down my thoughts about PVT Appleby and his legacy.

My name is Chris Harris, and I am honored to represent a nonprofit charitable organization called the *Family and Friends of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment Association*. Our organization’s mission is to honor, preserve and communicate the history of all generations of courageous 508th Paratroopers, from World War II to present day.

First of all, Gene and Janis, Denise and Nate, George and Mindy and your wonderful children, thank you for allowing all of us to honor PVT Appleby alongside your family. It is a privilege to know you and to share this “homecoming” with you. While I might officially represent a “Family and Friends” organization, I trust you know from this week’s ceremonies that you have newfound family and friends here in Ohio and beyond.

How to reflect on a young life nearly 73 years after PVT Appleby was lost on the normally tranquil farm fields of Eastern Holland on that pivotal Day 1 of Operation Market Garden, September 17, 1944.

First, like so many of the 16.5 million Americans who served in WWII around the globe, 95% of whom have now passed on, and 400,000 of whom lost their lives on the battlefields of Europe and throughout the Pacific, PVT Appleby was an ordinary American who set out to do the extraordinary tasks of freeing a world from tyranny.

**Chris Harris**

Vice President – *Family and Friends of the 508th PIR Association*

+1 310 729 2745 · harris.chris.j@att.net

**www.508PIR.org**

As a soldier, he was the “cream of the crop.” A Paratrooper in the famed 82nd Airborne Division, nicknamed the “All Americans”, and also a proud member of the 508th PIR—Company A, a proud 508th so-called “Red Devil.”

Paratroopers like PVT Appleby have always been a special breed. Adventurous, courageous, risk-takers—with the strongest sense of accomplishing the mission. After all, how many persons would jump out of an airplane behind enemy lines to pave the way for support troops to hopefully arrive as planned, all the while dealing with the most adverse and dangerous conditions during their plane ride to the drop zone, their fall from the sky, and their maneuvers on the ground?

PVT Appleby must have been one tough guy and a most physically-fit Paratrooper also. Why so? Well, like my Uncle who also parachuted into Eastern Holland—and unfortunately was killed in Day 2 of Market Garden—PVT Appleby was over 30 years old, much older than the bulk of Paratroopers who were in their late teens and early twenties. My Mom, now 93, still reminds me that her favorite brother, Jimmy, was really strong and fit. Bob Nobles, a 95-year old 508th WWII veteran that I talk with by phone, has said, “We always felt concerned for those old guys—during the marches and drills—but they sure kept up.” So, I conclude that PVT Appleby also held his own physically. And to this day, 508th Paratroopers combine character with professional training and outstanding fitness.

I am also going to surmise that PVT Appleby grew up with “All American” values, family relationships and community connections. And just like my Uncle Jimmy, who hailed from a rural farming community called Deerfield, population 3000, in Western Massachusetts—he was thrust in the world’s greatest conflict half-way around the globe.

**Chris Harris**

Vice President – *Family and Friends of the 508th PIR Association*

+1 310 729 2745 · harris.chris.j@att.net

**www.508PIR.org**

Mom remembers when that fateful telegram arrived via taxi from the next big town. She told her mother that “maybe it was a mistake.” Mom had her wedding shower that evening and she has said, “Your aunt and I just went to the party and never told anyone.” I can only think of PVT Appleby’s mother, Elizabeth, and sisters Jane and Kathleen, going through that same traumatic notification process, and worse yet, not ever having the closure of putting him to rest. It is only fitting that he be properly buried now nearly 73 years later after making the ultimate sacrifice.

So what is PVT Appleby’s lasting legacy? Well, of course, the Greatest Generation should be honored for saving the free world, for ushering in an unprecedented period of economic growth with new technologies in electronics, healthcare and communications that the world had never imagined.

When it comes to saving the free world, the Dutch people, who found PVT Appleby’s remains and treated them with extreme care and respect, know the price of freedom and remain forever grateful to PVT Appleby and all the allies who sacrificed during the War. Since the 1940s, generations of the Dutch have adopted graves at the Netherlands American Cemetery in the small town of Margraten. In fact, there is a waiting list for those who want to honor one of the 8301 Americans buried there by visiting gravesites on special occasions such as a fallen soldier’s birthday, Christmas and Memorial Day.

But PVT Appleby’s legacy goes beyond this in a more special way. Remember, he was a 508th Paratrooper, a proud Red Devil, the “DIABLO that Landed”, and he and his comrades set the highest standards for subsequent generations of 508th Paratroopers.

**Chris Harris**

Vice President – *Family and Friends of the 508th PIR Association*

+1 310 729 2745 · harris.chris.j@att.net

**www.508PIR.org**

He and his 508th comrades, those who perished in Europe and those who returned home or continued their Army careers, paved the way for an elite Airborne unit who America and the rest of the world has continued to call on in the toughest of times for over seven decades. From the streets of Santo Domingo, to the jungles of Vietnam, to the beach sands of Grenada, to the burning neighborhoods of Panama City, to the deserts of Iraq, and to the mountains of Afghanistan, the 508th PIR has been called upon in times of crisis to preserve freedom and ensure stability and peace. It is a totally unenviable task exemplified by PVT Appleby's untimely death at such a young age. And while we long for a day without human conflict, unfortunately the sacrifices continue to this day, with some 69 508th Paratroopers, who having followed in the footsteps of PVT Appleby, have also made the ultimate sacrifice during multiple deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan.

So in honor of PVT Appleby, several 508th veterans are gathered here today to pay their final respects. We have Don Jakeway from WWII, Larry Weaver and Chris Kreuser from Panama/Operation Just Cause in the late 1980s, and Eric Sowers and Delbert Grush—Delbert all the way from Florida—from an Operation Enduring Freedom deployment in Afghanistan during 2007-2008. This is the unique legacy of PVT Appleby—three generations of “Red Devils” who have served America and the world going on 75 years and who have sacrificed so much so that today literally billions of people around the world enjoy freedom and prospects for better lives.

**Chris Harris**

Vice President – *Family and Friends of the 508th PIR Association*

+1 310 729 2745 · harris.chris.j@att.net

**www.508PIR.org**

Let me conclude with the following:

To the entire family of PVT Appleby, just as the Dutch people never forget, we will never forget.

To Private Gene J. Appleby:

- After all these years, welcome home, and may you finally be at rest beside your mother, Elizabeth, and your sister, Louise.
- May you also know the everlasting admiration and comradery of all your 508th PIR brothers and sisters.
- And in honor of you and all our fallen soldiers, may all of us never forget the inscription on the monument at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, honoring 508th Paratroopers lost in the Dominican Republic that reads: ***“Let their sacrifices for the course of freedom be an inspiration to us all.”***

Thank you for listening and reflecting.

Chris Harris

Nephew of PFC James A. Childs – 508th PIR C Co

(Normandy/Holland – KIA 18 September 1944)

