

2011 Parade Grand Marshal Americo “Rico” T. Pace of West Hartford, Conn.

Corporal Americo “Rico” T. Pace was a member of the **U.S. Army’s 197th AAA (AW) Battalion** during World War II. Drafted in 1942 and trained in amphibious, anti-aircraft and anti-tank warfare, Pace was part of the first wave of soldiers who landed on Omaha Beach in Normandy, France on June 6, 1944, just hours in advance of the D-Day invasion of 160,000 Allied troops. His recollections of that historic battle still are vivid today.

After recuperating from the emotional scars of the Battle of Normandy, Pace and the 197th AAA (AW) Battalion continued to serve. This included in the Battle of Cherbourg in France, the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium, France and Luxembourg, the crossing of the Rhine River, and engaged in occupational duties in Germany after the Nazis surrendered. He returned home to Hartford in 1945.

Pace’s family came to Hartford from Italy, just months after his birth, in search of citizenship and a better life. They named him Americo in honor of their new land; his surname means Peace. His father died when the boy was just 10 years of age, leaving a wife and Pace’s four siblings. At age 12, he starting working, doing odd jobs to help support his family, while still going to school. Upon graduation from Hartford Public High School, he began a lifetime of work for the former Allen Manufacturing Co. in Hartford. He spent a total of 48 years with that same company, before and after his service in the U.S. Army, until he retired in 1986 from the position of Inside Sales Manager.

Quiet retirement was not for Pace and, for the past 25 years, he has been balancing two part-time volunteer jobs that make the most of his dynamic and warm personality. A Greeter at Saint Francis Hospital & Medical Center’s visitors desk, Pace welcomes hundreds of people every day. The active volunteer is a recipient of the Saint Francis Spirit Award for his unwavering support of the Hospital. Pace also spends several days a week at the Connecticut State Capitol Building and the Legislative Office Building, where he provides informative tours to tourists, school groups, and other visitors.

Now 89 years of age, Pace has been married to his wife, Petronella, for 64 year,s with whom he raised four children in West Hartford. Both a U.S. and an Italian flag proudly hang from a post on his front lawn. He has been involved in many veterans and community and civic organizations throughout his life. He is a longtime member of the Italian-American War Veterans, and served six terms as President of Hartford’s Pratolano Italian Mutual Society which was co-founded by his father. He has worshipped at St. Patrick-St. Anthony Church for 75 years, serving in many roles. The former Hartford Selectman also served as Democratic Chairman of Hartford’s old First Ward.