



Savannah Morning News file photo

A model of sculptor James Mastin's vision for the proposed monument

HAITIANS IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

- The Chasseurs Volontaires de Saint-Domingue was the largest unit of soldiers of African descent to fight in the Revolutionary War.
- The unit suffered losses of 25 men killed or wounded in its 1779 actions in Savannah.
- The next year, when the British captured Charleston, more than 60 Chasseurs were captured.
- Another Haitian unit participated in a French and Spanish campaign against British forces in Pensacola, Fla., in 1780. Those soldiers faced some of the same British units that had battled the Chasseurs.

Source: Haitian American Historical Society

Effort

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to put "together the stories of these two countries."

An indelible tie between the U.S. and Haiti was formed on the morning of Oct. 9, 1779, during the climatic battle of the Siege of Savannah, said Jamal Touré, a living historian who attended the ceremony in the uniform of the Chasseurs Volontaires, the 500-man Haitian unit that served here.

The Haitian soldiers were free men, he said, and among the soldiers was Henri Christophe, later the first ruler of free Haiti. They were concentrated in the area where Garrison Elementary School stands today, in reserve as

the main allied attack struck the British defenses and was repulsed in one of the bloodiest struggles of the war.

As the shattered French and American soldiers fell back, "the call was made to the Haitians to provide a retreat," said Touré. "They shed their blood right here."

Local historian Dr. Preston Russell, who chatted with the Haitians in French before the ceremonies began, said Revolutionary War witnesses credited the Haitians with saving the French and American armies.

Their participation in the Siege of Savannah is an important chapter in Haitian history, said Fils-Aime, and the depiction of it in Franklin Square "will change people's perceptions about Haitians."