By late 1915 France becoming acutely aware of the losses of soldiers in the fighting. Russia needs weapons and equipment to stay in the war. Diplomats negotiate a deal.

By 1917: Allies will have provided Russia with tons of material:
- France: 400,000 rifles; 23 million artillery shells; 740 artillery pieces; 8.4 million grenades; 796 airplanes
- England: 60,000 rifles and 35 million rounds of ammunition
- US: 120,000 Rifles
- Italy: 300,000 Rifles
- Japan: ??

Five brigades of Russian soldiers are detailed to the West. Nearly 40,000 soldiers will eventually come. Four brigades will arrive, the 5th does not. The French thought they would get 400,000 men.

Note: Russia could ill afford to send soldiers. By the end of 1915; Russia had suffered 2.5 million casualties!
1st and 3rd Brigades serve around Reims, France

2nd and 4th Brigades serve in Salonika, Greece

5th Brigade never leaves Russia ... The 1st (Feb. 1917) revolution intervenes!

Attitude of the Russian Soldiers is good ... a new experience

The French people are curious about the Russians, while the French military is unsure of the combat ability of the soldiers or their leaders

In France Two brigades will serve; approx. 19,000 – 20,000 men

- 1st Brigade recruited from the area around Moscow – urban
- 3rd Brigade recruited from the countryside, Siberia – rural

Russian soldiers adopt French weapons, equipment and integrate their traditions
Russian units go into the trenches NE of Reims in the Champagne Region.

The first elements of the R.E.F. enter combat on 15 July 1916.

The presence of the Russian soldiers surprise the Germans.

Russian soldiers disliked having to use helmets and gas masks.

They frequently discarded them only to recognize a need for them later!

"Misha" — Mascot of the 3rd Brigade

Disappears in France after the war

The two Russian brigades will be involved in General Neville's disastrous attacks at the Chemin des Dames in April 1917.

- Has impact on Russian morale ... high casualties.
The French army mutinies after the Chemin des Dame offensive.

- Will not attack ... only stay on defensive.
- Marshall Petain appointed as French Chief of Staff ... by June 1917 the morale of the French soldier is being restored.
- Germans NEVER learn of the French mutinies!!

Over 600 death sentences; 43 mutineers were executed!

Impact of Russian Revolution of February 1917

By April 1917 soldiers of the R.E.F. learn of the first revolution of 1917 in Russia. Coupled with the French mutinies, concern about reliability of R.E.F.

- 1st Brigade rebelled in the camp and would not fight. Followed the orders of the Provisional government and the Soviets in Russia.
- 3rd Brigade remained mostly loyal (joined by 1,000 from the 1st) and assisted by Russian artillery and the French put down the rebellious 1st Brigade at La Courtine resulting in 10 killed & 44 wounded.
Leaders and other rebellious soldiers were sent to prisons (approx. 650)

The soldiers were sent to concentration camps in Algeria (3,300) or work camps in France (2,700 – 3,000)

Work in French war industry would account for 2,400 of soldiers.

The Russian Legion (of Honor)

Formed in October 1917 from soldiers of the 3rd brigade and small numbers of the 1st brigade.

- 59 officers & 1,959 soldiers joined the unit.
- Assigned as part of 4th Moroccan Infantry Regiment; a unit of the French Foreign Legion.
- April 1918 will enter combat near Amiens and later at the Marne River ... savage fighting!
- Will wear the French uniforms of the colonial troops (khaki)
- On Armistice Day, only 524 Russian soldiers remained in ranks.
- After the war renamed “The Russian Legion of Honor”

After the war the French government begins to repatriate the R.E.F.

- The majority of the original 40,000 choose to return to Russia.
- France is slow to send them back to Russia.
- Those in prison camps in North Africa are on low priority.

Some Russians decide to remain in France, although their lives will be difficult after the French government withdraws support ... had paid an allowance to each soldier!
By end of the war over 9,200 Russian soldiers (officers & men) will have been either killed or wounded in combat on the Western Front in France. Others suffered from illness and accidental or weather related injuries.

Many of the Russian dead are buried near where they died on the Western Front. The largest cemetery contains nearly 1,000 graves.
Memory of Russian participation on the Western Front is only reflected in this cemetery and church at Mourmelon-le-Grand.

Money for construction came from French sources.
- Designed in 1934
- Begun in 1936
- Consecrated in 1937

In the end:
- R.E.F. had no noticeable effect on the Western Front.
- R.E.F. was distrusted by the French because of the revolt.
- R.E.F. soldiers fought bravely in combat. Many received Russian & French decorations.
By 1921, approximately 4,800 Russian soldiers from the two R.E.F. brigades and repatriated Russian prisoners of war from Germany still remained in France. Struggle for those who remained in France... feared returning to Russia. Civil War! The remaining few will become part of the Russian community of France who fled Russia after the problems of 1905 and 1917.

"On 21 June 2011 a monument was at last dedicated to the R.E.F., in the presence of the Russian Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, and the French Prime Minister, Francois Fillon.”

“Among the Russian forces was George Tarasov, a pilot of the Russian squadron on the Western Front. Later, exiled in Belgium and then widowed, he was to become Archbishop George Tarasov of the Paris Archdiocese of the Russian Orthodox Church (+ 1981).”

To all those who fought for the Orthodox Faith in the Great War -- Eternal Memory!
For further information