

## An Orthodox Priest in the Foreign Legion



Hieromonk Alexis Dumond

The French Foreign Legion was founded 178 years ago. From the start it included many individuals who had experienced great personal problems and wanted to start their lives again. Today, its soldiers are of 138 different nationalities. Among them are Orthodox who for the last three years have been spiritually cared for by a priest of the Diocese of the Moscow Patriarchate in France, Hieromonk Alexis Dumond, priest of the Russian church in Marseille. In an interview with Svetlana Bukharina of the Russian Orthodox Radio Radonezh, Fr Alexis explained aspects of his life.

By 2003, he explained, over 40% of the Legionnaires were from Eastern Europe, from many parts of the former Soviet Union, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and elsewhere. He said that he had been chosen to be the Orthodox chaplain of the Legion, since he had experience with the armed forces. His pastoral work is especially needed in flashpoints, among soldiers who had experienced death and suffering and some who had even lost their faith as a result. The legionnaires are all volunteers, for whom the greatest reward is French citizenship, for the pay itself is very poor.

In his interview, Fr Alexis commented that generally the Eastern European legionnaires do not speak French or know French customs. They usually come to the Legion after some great crisis in their lives and so naturally turn to a priest. However, they are stronger, both mentally and physically, than those of other backgrounds and often aim at promotion. Many have already served in the Eastern European armies of the Warsaw Pact or of the former Soviet Union, but are now superfluous to the needs of the military there. They are all patriots and do not forget their homelands. Although in his time Fr Alexis has baptised twelve of them and eleven children from their families, most of them are already baptised but want and need regular Church life.