

The Napoleon Series

A Memoir of the Cossacks in the Netherlands, 22-24 November 1813

Translated and edited by [Marc Geerdink-Schaftenaar](#)
Julianadorp, the Netherlands

The text below is a transcription from a printed memoir by Barend Harms Adel, a merchant from Amsterdam. He describes how he first meets the Cossacks and their officers, and provides them with information about the situation in Amsterdam, and how to travel safest. There is a small setback when he discovers that some are planning to halt the Cossack advance, but after the French troops are beaten back, the Cossacks enter Amsterdam.

He is then asked to travel across the Zuiderzee to Amsterdam to deliver dispatches, a task he refuses at first, knowing that travelling by sea is dangerous, but at last accepts. He concludes by stating he has done his duty; a declaration by a Russian officer is added.

The memoir was first written down by Barend Harms Adel, later he edited it and had it printed. The written manuscript, together with newspapers describing the events, were stored away and forgotten by his family for years, and only discovered in 2014 in an inheritance.

I was fortunate enough to be contacted by a family member who wanted some information about the events that are described. She sent me some scans, and I found the printed version on Google Books, from which I made this transcription. I stayed close to the text of the transcription, adding punctuation only to clarify some passages. Many thanks to ms. Jantine Leeflang for the scans of the original manuscript.

**“MEMOIR
of
B.H. ADEL.
About the services by him provided
To the Russian Troups,
Concerning their entry into
Amsterdam in the month of November
1813¹**

On the twentieth of November 1813, I travelled from Amsterdam to Harderwijk for my affairs, at which I arrived at 11:30 hours at the landing stage, and heard that at that same day, 3 to 400 Frenchmen had been put ashore by gunboats.

¹ “Printed in June, to be paid by the author, and available in Amsterdam at C. Timmer, 1814”

I was worried when I heard of this, but arriving at Harderwijk at 12 o'clock, I noticed they had already left. I stayed the night there and travelled the next day to Putten, situated about two hours distance² from Harderwijk, where I heard on the twenty-second in the morning at breakfast by express, coming from the last mentioned town, that our saviours, the Russian troops, had entered there on Monday at four o'clock.

This news delighted me, and therefore I pursued the goal of my travels, namely my business, for which I came here in the first place. – Next arrived at Putten a patrol of Russian Cossacks, which delighted me, and I hurried to offer my assistance to the best of my abilities. – These had not yet passed through, or there were already others that followed them, and soon after that came a large party of Russian Cossacks, among them was the Russian Major Markly³, in a coach drawn by four horses. I welcomed him when he stepped out of his coach, and he, not knowing me, asked if I was the mayor, which I denied; but I promised his Lordship I'd help him on his way, which I immediately did. When the Major heard that I was a merchant from Amsterdam, and that I had travelled from there only two days ago, he understood that I could give him the best information about the town, which indeed was so, and I did not refrain from his request, but told him everything I knew.

When he had received all the information he needed, he longed to be in Amsterdam, and urged me to tell him what was the best way to get there as soon as possible, to which I answered that travelling across the water was not an option, because too many gunships patrolled the Zuiderzee. And because it was too risky to try it, and the Major having a map, I therefore instructed him that travelling over land was the safest; taking the route from Putten to Nieuwkerk⁴, to Spakenburg, Zoedijk⁵, Hilversum, 's Graveland, Ankeveen and then to Amsterdam; to which the Major, taking heed, soon continued his travel to Nieuwkerk. I followed him soon after he left, when the mayor of Garderen⁶ followed me, having been to Putten, to which I had expressed my desire to be of help to the Russians; to which he asked me in reply why I hadn't stepped into the coach when they had offered me to do so; to which I requested the mayor to follow up on the coachman of the Major to ask him to reduce his speed, in order for me to catch up on the coach, for which I would cross the fields; but it was of no use, since they were already too far ahead.

I spoke to the mayor again at the inn "De Muis", one hour from Nieuwkerk on this side⁷, who informed me they were all far ahead, which caused me much grief; but the mayor comforted me by saying: "I will go to the mayor of Nieuwkerk, and I'm sure the Major will be there, I will make sure that you will talk to him."

² About 10 kilometres

³ Major Marclay

⁴ Nijkerk, Guelderland province

⁵ Soestdijk, near Baarn, Utrecht province

⁶ Garderen, today a small village between Amersfoort and Apeldoorn, Guelderland province

⁷ The inn "De Muis" ["The Mouse"] was situated between Putten en Nijkerk, about 5 kilometres from Nijkerk.

I arrived that evening at six o'clock in Nieuwerk and went to the house of the mayor, and asked there for the mayor of Garderen, who came to me immediately and brought me to the room where the General and the Government⁸ were gathered.

The Major was in another room with a gentleman, and in his absence, I noticed two persons who were in my presence during my conversation with the mayor of Garderen, one being from Utrecht and the other from Amersfoort, who talked about the cossacks. Saying that these were at the Beek (a closed off place), that they were unable to go either forth or back, but had to travel along the same road, this being an excellent opportunity to reach their goal, that is to trick the Cossacks.

Upon hearing this, I waited for the Major to again enter the room; at which I touched his arm and left the room, and he followed me immediately; I informed him that they were plotting treason against him; requesting him to arm himself against it, which he promised and did by doubling the posts.

In the morning on Tuesday the twenty-third November 1813, this treason indeed came to pass; at half past three the battle near Amersfoort and Nieuwkerk was fought, in which some Frenchmen, soldiers and cossack horses were killed and some cossacks and horses were wounded. – After this, Major Markly retreated in the morning at five o'clock to Harderwijk, - getting up out of bed I saw the French again at the door of the mayor, at which I hurried to leave this place.

Next I reached at the inn “De Muis” where I had my breakfast; then the first patrol of Russian cossacks arrived there, and a quarter of an hour further they again got involved in a skirmish.

I resumed my travel by a farm road and arrived on the main road near the Alster mill, where an acquaintance of mine lived, whom I told everything that had happened; and staying there for a while, we realised we were standing between the French and the Cossacks, and since I had aimed my journey towards Harderwijk, but was unable to get there, I returned again through the fields to Putten and thus had to leave Major Markly. – I did not know what could happen at the time, and it ended well, - the Major drove the French away, arrived that same evening in Nieuwkerk, retook the same position, and continued his journey to Spakenburg, Soesdijk, Hilversum, 's Graveland, Ankeveen to Amsterdam, as I had instructed him the day before on the map. Aforementioned Major arrived Wednesday morning the twenty-fourth safely in Amsterdam with his subordinate Cossacks, and myself the twenty-third again in Putten, where everyone was embarrassed by the events at Nieuwkerk, but that evening another 300 Russian Cossacks arrived, a sight to which we were all very delighted, and I joined them also to instruct them and help them, since I had been acquainted there for several years.

Major Elsenwangen and his officers took up residence at one of my best friends, who were also told who I was and that I had just arrived from Amsterdam three days ago, and therefore could give them the best information about the situation in the town. – This I did not refuse, also because the Majors' interpreter asked me if I could take with me letter for the government in Amsterdam; which I gladly accepted; - an hour after

⁸ I have no idea which general and government he mentions here.

that, at the house of the reverend Van Niel, I received the order to come to the Major, who asked me if I could join Baron Alexander von Zwehl and two Cossacks on a ship to Amsterdam; this I did not want, since there were a lot of gunboats crossing the Zuiderzee, and because that was very dangerous, I refused; - but the Major insisted, and described the danger in which the town was, saying: "Don't you have a wife and children? Are they worth nothing to you? I'm letting Baron Von Zwehl go with you, he dares it, and you wouldn't dare anything?" He thus convincing me, I told him: "I'll do it, here's my hand," to which he replied: "We need you."

I then said: "If you thus force me, then I have a request; that is, that you send a Cossack detachment to Utrecht and to Amersfoort, in order to scare General Molitor". – The Major accepted this proposition immediately, it was executed immediately and had its advantageous effect.

We resumed our journey, and were guided by a Cossack detachment from the front of the house of the Major to Harderwijk, where, having arrived at an outpost, the Baron Alexander von Zwehl and me entered alone, to find out if we could travel along with the ferryman Wynand van Buuren from there to Amsterdam; to which he objected; but his father convincing him, saying the town was in great danger, he accepted; and we were allowed to let the Cossacks, whom we had to leave outside, to come in; and we let them into the house of the ferryman's father until we departed, so as to keep everything a secret to the inhabitants of Harderwijk.

Thus we set sail and crossed the Zuiderzee safely, arriving at the Harderwijk landing stage; I then brought my fellow travellers to the house of the right honourable mr. Van der Hoop, President of the provisional government of the town of Amsterdam, and thus concluding I had done my duty to the fullest.

Actum Amsterdam

BAREND HARMS ADEL"

Declaration to Mr. B.H. Adel, from major Elsenwangen⁹

"Copy Translation.

DECLARATION

To Mister B.H. Adel, merchant in Amsterdam, I declare that above mentioned Mister B.H. Adel, merchant in Amsterdam, has given me in Putten, Gelderland province, on the twentythird November 1813, some information about the situation in Amsterdam, from which he had travelled only three days earlier; and having requested him to deliver a letter from me to the government at Amsterdam, as well as to accompany Mister Baron Von Zwehl and two Cossacks on a ship from Harderwijk across the Zuiderzee to Amsterdam; and with his dispatches deliver them to the Government in Amsterdam to the benefit of that town, and assist them with whatever they needed.

⁹ This declaration was added to the printed edition.

Therefore has aforementioned Mister B.H. Adel requested a declaration for himself and his family to an eternal remembrance.

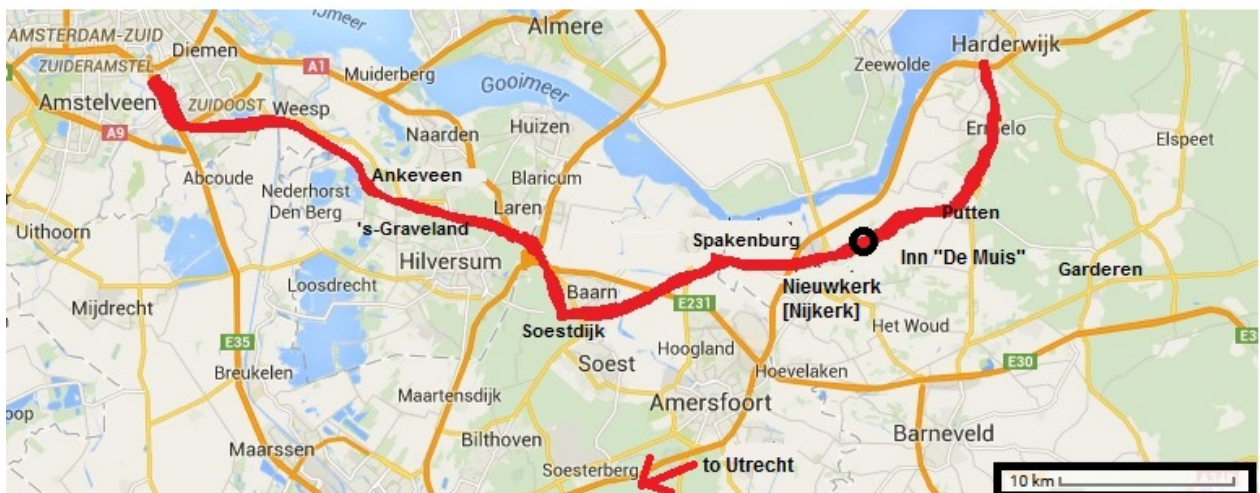
Drawn up in Amsterdam, 8 December 1813.

(Signed) ELSENWANGEN (S.S.)
Major in Russian service.”



**Possible route, taken by
Major Marclay and his
Cossack detachment, 22
- 24 November 1813:**

**Putten - Nijkerk -
Spakenburg - Soestdijk -
Hilversum -
's-Graveland - Ankeveen
- Amsterdam**



Placed on the Napoleon Series: February 2015