



# Sara Lidman: Tal till amerikanska soldater i Sydvietnam

**Talare**

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Författare

**Datum**

18 november 1965

**Plats**

Sydvietnam

**Omständigheter**

Manuskript från Sara Lidman-arkivet i Umeå, renskrivet och ändrat i enlighet med författarens eget korrektur av Svenska tals redaktör.

Dear Friends, I am taking this opportunity to have a small talk with you – with no other justification than the fact that we, you and I, happen to be in Viet Nam so far from our home countries in November 1965. Let me explain who I am and why I came here. My name is Sara Lidman. I was born in Sweden in the twenties in a poor province from where many unemployed people used to go to the States to make a living. Although Sweden today is a well-to-do country, my generation has not forgotten what poverty is like. And as a writer I have become more and more taken up with this problem: how mankind shall be able to rid itself of poverty. You certainly agree with me that as long as there is a single kid on earth starving it is a shame to all of us. I came to North Viet Nam some weeks ago believing that this country was still what we in the West call underdeveloped. You know as well as I do what horrors Viet Nam had to endure under French domination, in what state the colonialists left the country after Dien Bien Phu. It would have been only natural if this country had not had time to recover from that devastation in eleven years. But to my glad surprise I can see that everybody here is well fed and clad, there is no unemployment, children go to school, their theatre is wonderful – you know chaps, this is a flourishing land in all fields – were it not for Mac Namara's aircrafts hovering in the sky day and night ... How I wish I could meet you eye to eye, hear your own explanation to your duty – whether you accept it brain and heart ... Last July a film from Saigon was shown on Swedish TV in which a number of you were asked to give your opinion on your stay in Viet Nam. Some of you said: I think we are doing a fine job here. Quite a number of you said: We must check the communists somewhere. One of you said: I prefer to keep my opinion to myself. Now the rest of the film made us all shrink in horror: so this is US aid in Viet Nam, this is Western civilisation exported to



Asia. Incredible pictures are entering every corner of the world demonstrating the type of job you are doing – and honestly speaking, men – it is no fine job at all. If some years ahead your kids at home should find a newspaper from 1965 and start questioning you: "Daddy, what were you doing in Viet Nam?" What shall you say? If your son is bright and with a heart beating in his little body he may blush if you give him a lazy slogan in reply like: Oh your dad was doing a fine job over there. What is explanation enough to Mac Namara may not satisfy your son ... As to checking the communists somewhere – why dig up Mac Carthy from his grave and fight for that ghost. If the Vietnamese here in Viet Nam wish to follow the teachings of Buddha, Marx, The Pope, Confutse – that is their business, isn't it. Why should you be their spiritual police and decide for them? You remember at the last election in the States that some of you did not want to see Mr Johnson as your president. But what would you have said if an Asian country had sent troops to America disturbing the election campaign, killing right and left under the pretext: well we have got to check the democrats somewhere ...By the way fellows – have you ever read the Geneva agreement of 1954? If not, tell your government that you wish to study the document. It may give you some information you have been wanting. Do you believe that any one of the strong men in Saigon from Ngoh Dinh Diem to the present Nguyen Cao Ky has any support from the Vietnamese people? Do you think they deserve respect – as political leaders and human beings? Do you consider Ngyen Cao Ky worthy of your support – is it good enough for you to fight and die for such a figure? The other day I had a sad encounter with one of you, an image of you who might have been my own cousin. It was in Tran Hoa province. My Vietnamese friends had showed me what was left of 55 buildings of the sanatorium you raided three times i July and August. My friends also let me see a lazy dog and explained how it works. Then someone brought a pilot's outfit – a helmet, the book Survival, revolver, fishing line, aspirin and all the other little things you bring with you in case ... The moment before I had been enraged at anything American – and now seeing this whitish helmet I went hot with shame, a double guilt. A similar agony rose from that empty helmet as I had felt at the description of how a lazy dog slowly kills a child. Neither an American pilot nor a Vietnamese kid is made of steel and concrete. There was also an identity card with a picture of your missing comrade. At first I did not wish to see it. But later, in the hope he would give some explanation to his life and death in Viet Nam I did look at his picture – and saw a handsome boy born in 1944. How familiar he was, I thought I had always known him – and I startled at his family name: it was Scandinavian. A fair stubborn youth who would never

devote himself until it was unavoidable, never believe until he was convinced, never let a girl get the better of him until he was mad about her. Up until the day this photo was taken, nothing had happened to him that was stronger than him. But what resources for a deep passion, for a great responsibility, there were hidden in his cheekbones ...He had never decided to go to Viet Nam to fight communism. He did not bother about politics anywhere. He was sent here, wrapped up like a parcel with explosives to destroy "targets" – schools hospitals bridges – he did not question – he thought it did not matter what he was doing as long as he played it cool. He was only 21. He thought he had so much time to waste before he would let life get hold of him in earnest, before he would say yes or no ...Slowly his picture became alive with regret. A white anger surged up from the bottom of his eyes. And I thought I could hear him cry: They have cheated me at the Pentagon! They promised me a fine job in Viet Nam and a bright future afterwards in the States. And here I am – thrown away like a lump of dirt. Dear friends – each one of us has just one life – once it is gone it does not return. Put a higher value to that single life of yours. Make up your mind. Why should you spend months and years killing people all over Viet Nam – people who only wish to live in peace. Why should you yourself die for Mr Nguyen Cao Ky? Why should you not live instead, start living in a new way, at home, in love?

**Taggar**

1960-tal, 1965, FNL-rörelsen, Fredsrörelsen, Kvinna, Vietnamkriget

**URI**

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