



Sara Lidman: Tal till amerikanska soldater i Sydvietnam

Talare

Sara Lidman
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.

1 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
5 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
10 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.

15 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
20 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
25 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 ...

30

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
35 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
40 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
45 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
50 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,
55 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
60 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
65 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
70 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
75 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 –
80 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
85 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
90 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 ...

95 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.

100 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?

110

Taggar

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

URI

<https://www.svenskatal.se/tale/sara-lidman-tal-till-amerikanska-soldater-i-sydvietnam>

115

120

125

130

135

140