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front page and throughout the newspaper," said Observer managing editor Tom Fesperman. "By the time they got to the comic page they wanted relief." William C. Baggs, editor of The Miami News, says his newspaper is also thinking about dropping it. "That comic strip," says Baggs, "plays propaganda on the comic page like 'Little Orphan Annie' has for years."

Apolitical: "Tales" artist Joe Kubert insists, however, that the strip is apolitical, simply a straight, romantic adventure. "I don't think we're taking any side, either hawk or dove," says Kubert. "The fact is the United States is there and we're doing the strip as though we are there." But he admits that portraying the war in Vietnam creates problems of reader empathy that other, simpler wars don't: "We're the big guy fighting the little guy and the American has always been for the underdog."

Partly for that reason, perhaps, most of the war comic books, which aim at an audience between 7 and 17, are still going back a generation for story lines. "World War II seems to be the main event," Robert Kanigher, editor of war comic books for National Periodical Publications, Inc., told NEWSWEEK's Lee Smith. "I think it was more glamorous. There were tanks, airplanes, infantry. Vietnam is just guerrilla warfare on a large scale."

Of National's five war comic books only "Capt. Hunter" is fighting in the present tense; the others are all conducting rear-guard actions with the past. "Capt. Storm" is a wooden-legged PT-boat commander battling the Japanese; "GI Combat" features a tank crew, guided by the ghost of Confederate cavalryman J.E.B. Stuart, defying German Panzers; in "War Stories" a World War II Yank flier duels Japanese and prehistoric monsters in the Pacific. Don't bet on the Japs—or the dinosaurs.

Pop Goes the War

ZAP! OOPH! CRASH! It's the Vietnam story no one will ever find on the front pages—it's being fought relentlessly on the funny pages. With a patriotic POW!, America's comic-strip heroes have thrown themselves into the battle against the foe in Southeast Asia.

Many aging veterans of earlier battles have been called up for the new campaign and some are already waging preventive warfare against the Chinese Communists. Along the front last week: Navy flier Buz Sawyer, fresh from a napalm strike against the VC, was trying to rescue a radio operator whose jet plane had been shot down off the coast of North Vietnam; Terry of "Terry and the Pirates" was trying to smuggle a defecting Communist big shot out of Red China; and Air Force Col. Steve Canyon was trying to foil an insidious Chicom plot to test atom bombs in the good old U.S. of A.

Blood and Guts: The old heroes are doing well enough, but a new war needs new blood and guts and "Tales of the Green Beret," a comic strip based on Robin Moore's fact-fiction novel about the Special Forces, is supplying them. Last week, "Tales" hero Chris Tower, having been captured, blindfolded and bound to a wooden chair by a band of Saigon juvenile delinquents threatening to sell him to the Viet Cong, escaped by flattening his lone guard with a flying block—chair on his back and all.

"Tales," which started in April and now appears in about 75 newspapers, escalated its attack still further last week by mustering in a 12-cent Dell comic book. On the newsstands, Dell's Tower is fighting alongside another Special Forces hero, "Capt. Hunter" of National Periodical Publications, Inc. Modeled after Donald Dawson, a 25-year-old civilian from Costa Mesa, Calif., who went on a hunt for his lost brother last year in Viet Cong territory, Hunter searches indefatigably for his lost twin, Nick, a downed pilot. From time to time, Capt. Hunter pauses to destroy the VC, most recently by training Vietnamese children (K for Kindergarten Company) to wipe out guerrillas by rushing their trenches in suicidal waves.

Handling the comic-book war is not all ghoulish child's play. The truth is that some Viet comics are having much the same kind of trouble holding reader support for their war that the Administration is having rallying support for the real war.

Several weeks ago The Charlotte Observer dropped "Tales" after a handful of complaints about its paramilitary bloodthirstiness ("Why not sell hot dogs at car wrecks?" grumbled one critic) and suspected reader indifference. "People were reading about the war on the