

Kuwaiti gunmen kill one in attack on U.S. troops

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ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

KUWAIT — Two Kuwaiti gunmen in a pickup truck attacked U.S. forces during war games yesterday on an island in the Persian Gulf, killing one Marine and wounding another before they were shot to death by U.S. troops. Kuwait called the assault a "terrorist act."

The Pentagon said the assailants pulled up to a group of Marines conducting urban assault training on Failaka, an uninhabited island off Kuwait's coast, and opened fire with small arms. They then drove to another site,

stopped and attacked again before being killed by Marines, the Pentagon said.

Marines later found three AK-47s and ammunition inside the vehicle, according to a statement released in Washington, D.C., by the Bahrain-based U.S. Fifth Fleet. It said the injured Marine was hit in the arm.

In a brief statement, the Kuwaiti Interior Ministry condemned the attack and identified the assailants as Anas al-Kandari, born in 1981, and Jassem al-Hajiri, born in 1976. It said both were Kuwaiti civilians.

An Interior Ministry official, speaking

on condition of anonymity, described the two men as fundamentalist Muslims. More than 30 of their friends and relatives were detained for questioning, he said.

"The ministry announces that this is a terrorist act," the Interior Ministry said in a statement. "It will not allow anyone to undermine the country's security."

Pentagon spokesman Lt. Daniel Heltage said the Marines returned to their ships shortly after the attack, but would resume exercises on the island today.

Failaka Island, about 10 miles east of Kuwait City, was abandoned by its

inhabitants when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, and Iraqi forces heavily mined it during their occupation.

After a U.S.-led coalition liberated Kuwait in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the government compensated islanders for their property and resettled them on the mainland. The island has since been cleared of mines and many Kuwaitis fish there on weekends. Some former residents visit occasionally.

The shooting attack was unprecedented in Kuwait, a Washington, D.C., ally since the Gulf War. More than a decade later, most Kuwaitis remain supportive of the close relationship.

Pentagon spokeswoman Victoria Clarke said the two Marines were taken to the Armed Forces Hospital in Kuwait City, where one of them died of his wounds. Their names were withheld until relatives were contacted.

The military exercise, dubbed Eager Mace 2002, involves Kuwaitis at some stages. However, the Pentagon said the attack happened during an exercise that only involved U.S. forces.

The war games started Oct. 1, after the amphibious transport ships USS Denver and USS Mount Vernon arrived in Kuwaiti waters and began unloading 1,000 Marines and their equipment.

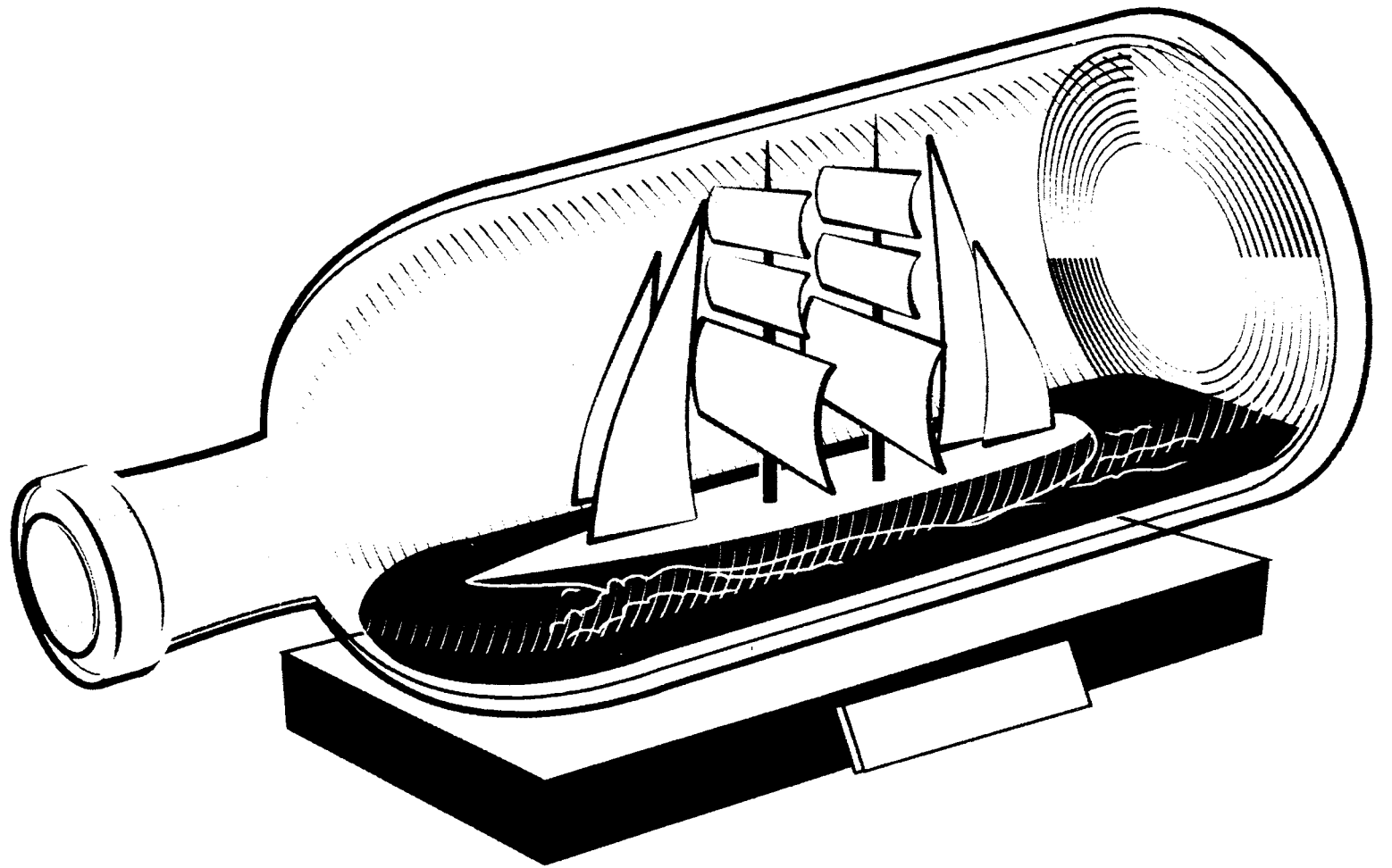
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