**Fast Attack Craft**

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A fast attack craft of the [Chilean Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chilean_Navy)

A **fast attack craft** (FAC) is a small, fast, agile and offensive [warship](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warship) armed with [anti-ship missiles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-ship_missiles), [gun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naval_gun) or [torpedoes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torpedo). FACs are usually operated in close proximity to land as they lack both the [seakeeping](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seakeeping) and all-round defensive capabilities to survive in [blue water](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue-water_navy). The size of the vessel also limits the fuel, stores and water supplies. Size wise they are usually between 50–400 tons and can reach speeds of 25–50 knots.

A fast attack craft's main advantage over other warship types is its affordability. Many FAC's can be deployed at a relatively low cost, allowing a navy who is at a disadvantage to effectively defend itself against a larger adversary. A small boat, when equipped with the same weapons as its larger counterpart, can pose a serious threat to even the largest of capital ships.

**History**

As early as the mid-19th century, the [Jeune École](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeune_%C3%89cole)'s *poussiere navale* theory called for a great number of small, agile vessels to break up invading fleets of larger vessels. The idea was first put into action in the 1870s with the steam powered [torpedo boat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torpedo_boat), which was produced in large numbers by both the [Royal Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Navy) and the [Marine Nationale](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marine_Nationale). These new vessels proved especially susceptible to rough seas and to have limited utility in scouting due to their short endurance and low bridges. The potential threat was entirely extinguished with the introduction of the Torpedo Boat Destroyer (TBD) in 1893, a larger vessel, it could mount guns capable of destroying the torpedo boat before it was within range to use its own weapons.



PT boats at high speed in 1942

The idea was revived shortly before World War I with the craft using new gasoline engines. Italy and Great Britain were at the forefront of this design, with the [Coastal Motor Boat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coastal_Motor_Boat) (CMB) and the [*Motobarca Armata Silurante*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MAS_(boat)) (MAS). The outstanding achievement of the class was the sinking of the Austro-Hungarian battleship [SMS *Szent István*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMS_Szent_Istv%C3%A1n) by *MAS. 15* on June 10, 1918. The equivalent achievement for the CMBs was a lesser success; during the [Russian Civil War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Civil_War) CMBs attacked the Red Fleet at anchor at Kronstadt on June 18, 1919, sinking the cruiser [*Pamiat Azova*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_cruiser_Pamiat_Azova) for the loss of four craft.

The design matured in the mid-1930s as the [Motor Torpedo Boats](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motor_Torpedo_Boat) (MTBs) and [Motor Gun Boats](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motor_Gun_Boat) (MGBs) of the Royal Navy, the [PT boats](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PT_boat) of the US Navy, and the [E-boats](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-boats) (*Schnellboote*) of the *Kriegsmarine*. All types saw extensive use during [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) but were limited in effectiveness due to the increasing threat of aircraft.

After WW2, the use of this kind of craft steadily declined in the USA and Britain, despite the introduction of safer diesel engines to replace the highly flammable gasoline ones, although the [Soviet Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union) still had large numbers of MGBs and MTBs in service.

**Missile boats**



A [Komar class missile boat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Komar_class_missile_boat) launching a [Styx missile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Styx_missile)

With the development of the [anti-ship missile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-ship_missile) FACs were reborn in the Soviet Union as **missile boats** or **missile cutters**. The first few missile boats were originally torpedo boats, with the torpedo tubes replaced by missile launchers. Again, small fast craft could attack and destroy a major warship. The idea was first tested by the Soviet Union as Project 183R which, in August 1957, produced the [Komar-class](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Komar_class_missile_boat) which mounted two [P-15 Termit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P-15_Termit) missiles in box-launchers on a 25 m hull backed with a twin 25 mm gun. Four diesels gave the Komars 4,800 bhp and a top speed of around 40 knots. Endurance was limited to 1000 nm at 12 knots and the vessels had supplies for only five days at sea. 110 Komar-class vessels were produced, while over 400 examples were built of the following [Osa-class](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osa_class_missile_boat) with a significant portion of the total being sold to pro-Soviet nations.

Two Egyptian [Komar missile boats](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Komar_class_missile_boat) sank the Israeli destroyer [INS *Eilat*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Zealous_(R39)) on October 21, 1967 as she sailed too close to Port Said. Five Israeli [Sa'ar 3-class missile boats](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sa%27ar_3-class_missile_boat) and [Sa'ar 4-class missile boats](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sa%27ar_4-class_missile_boat) sank one Syrian [torpedo boat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torpedo_boat), one [minesweeper](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minesweeper_(ship)), two [Komar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Komar_class_missile_boat) and one [Osa class missile boats](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osa_class_missile_boat) in the [Battle of Latakia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Latakia) on October 7/8, 1973. Indian FACs of the [Vidyut class](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vidyut_class_missile_boat) (an Osa variant) attacked a Pakistani naval base on two occasions in December 1971, sinking a total of four ships; one destroyer (*Khaibar*), one minesweeper (*Muhafiz*) and two merchantmen (*Venus* and *Harmattan*), and damaging a further two vessels (*Gulf Star* and *Dacca*).



A [*Gepard* class vessel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gepard_class_fast_attack_craft) of the [German Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Navy)

The Soviet FACs prompted a NATO response, which became more intense after the sinking of the *Eilat*. The Germans and French worked together to produce a new FAC, resulting in 1968 in the *Combattante II* class. Built on a 47 or 49 meter hull with 12,000 bhp of MTU diesel engines driving four shafts; a common layout would have four MM-38 [Exocet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exocet) missiles in two sets of two box launchers, in line and offset to the right and left with a 76 mm gun forward and 40 mm twin guns aft. Built until 1974, a total of 68 *Combattante II*s were launched. The design was immediately followed by the *Combattante III* (1975–90) which added 9 meters to hull length but kept the same armaments (+ two twin 30 mm guns), 43 of this type were produced. A great many other shipyards produced their own versions of the *Combattante*, notably the Israeli *Sa'ar*/*Reshef* variants.

At the [Battle of Bubiyan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Bubiyan) in 1991 [Iraqi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq) FACs were destroyed by British [air-to-surface missiles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air-to-surface_missile). Later designs, such as the German [*Gepard* class](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gepard_class_fast_attack_craft) and Finnish [*Hamina* class](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamina_class_missile_boat) are equipped with [surface-to-air missiles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surface-to-air_missile) and [countermeasures](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flare_(countermeasure)).

Size has also increased, some designs reaching up to [corvette](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corvette) size, 800 tons including a [helicopter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helicopter), giving them extended modes of operation. In April 1996 during Israel's [Operation Grapes of Wrath](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Grapes_of_Wrath), IDF naval forces used [Sa'ar 4](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sa%27ar_4_class_missile_boat) and [Sa'ar 4.5](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sa%27ar_4.5_class_missile_boat) boats to shell the Lebanese coast with 76 mm fire, in conjunction with artillery and air attacks.

[Iran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran) and [North Korea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Korea) have some of the largest numbers of FACs in operation today. North Korea alone operates more than 300, while [Iran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran) have been seen developing "swarm boats" to be used as harassing vessels in the heavily contested littoral waters of the [Persian Gulf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persian_Gulf). To counter the threat, the [US Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/US_Navy) has been developing an ASUW Littoral Defensive Anti Surface Warfare doctrine, along with vessels such as the [littoral combat ship](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Littoral_combat_ship).

**See also**

* [Gunboat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gunboat)
* [Torpedo boat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torpedo_boat)
* [Missile boat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missile_boat)
* [Patrol boat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrol_boat)

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