**The Second American War of Independence**

Meanwhile, the British were harassing American shipping headed to France. The Royal Navy tried to starve France of imports and American shipping was an easy target. As well, the British were looking for British sailors who jumped ship to American vessels. There were plenty and they provided an excuse for the Royal Navy to seize American ships. An attempt to stop the American vessel *Chesapeake* in 1807 resulted in American casualties (including three dead) and the seizing of four alleged British deserters. The **Chesapeake Affair**pushed the so-called **War Hawks** in the U.S. Congress to agitate for war with Britain. It took nearly five years but they got a declaration of war on June 1, 1812.

For the Americans this seemed like an enormous risk, one requiring a lot of bravado. But it wasn’t. Britain was not prepared to turn the full force of its military might on the United States; it was too busy in Europe fighting France. In fact, the British government had not wanted a war with the Americans at all. The actions of British admirals on the high seas reflected the needs of the Royal Navy, not the desires of the British government.

Nor did the rise in hostilities necessarily reflect the desires and interests of settlers on either side of the border. Trade across the frontier between British North America and the United States had, in fact, been stimulated by the Napoleonic conflict. Rising British demand for wheat could not be met by British North America alone, and American producers and shippers took advantage of the situation to export their grain through Canadian ports (including Halifax and Saint John). According to contemporaries, American grain shippers smuggled sledges over snow and ice to Montreal in winter and in summer, “gigantic rafts loaded with the produce of forest and farm and guarded by armed men were floated down the Lake Champlain route from Vermont north.”[[1]](https://opentextbc.ca/preconfederation/chapter/7-8-the-war-of-1812/#footnote-6511-1)

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