and on the 3rd of February 1756 issued a proclamation which instructed the inhabitants of the southern counties of England to drive their cattle inland in case of a French landing, and thereby much aggravated the prevailing fear. But the invasion scheme was so far only a cover for an attack on Minorca, then held by Great Britain.

A squadron of twelve sail of the line was prepared at Toulon under La Galissonière, a veteran admiral who had entered the navy in the reign of Louis XIV. It escorted transports carrying 1 5,000 troops under the duc de Richelieu. The danger to Minorca, where the garrison had been allowed to fall below its due strength, was well known to the British ministers. On the 11th of March they appointed Admiral John Byng to command a squadron which was to carry reinforcements. He did not, however, leave St Helens till the 6th of April. Byng had with him ten sail of the line, and carried 3000 soldiers for the garrison. The ships were indifferently manned, and the admiralty refused to strengthen him by drafts from the ships it proposed to retain in the Channel. In order to find room for the soldiers, the marines of the squadron were left behind. There was therefore a danger that, if an encounter with the French fleet took place after the reinforcements were landed, the British squadron would be short-handed. Byng reached Gibraltar on the 2nd of May. The French invasion of Minorca had been carried out on the 19th of April. The governor of Gibraltar, General Fowke, refused to part with any of his soldiers to reinforce Minorca. On the 8th of May Byng sailed, and on the 19th he was in communication by signal with General Blakeney, governor of the fortress. Before the soldiers could be landed the French fleet came in sight. Byng had been joined by three ships of the line at Gibraltar, and had therefore thirteen ships to twelve. One of the French vessels, the “ Foudroyant” (84), was a finer warship than any in the British line, but in effective power Byng was at least equal to his opponent, and if his ships were poorly manned La Galissonière was in worse case. The British admiral rejected one of his small line-of-battle ships in order to engage in the then orthodox manner—van to van, centre to centre, and rear to rear, ship against ship. By the manœuvres of the afternoon of the 19th and morning of the 20th he gained the weather-gage, and then bore down on the enemy at an angle, the van of the English steering for the van of the French. The sixth ship in his line, the “ Intrepid” (74), having lost her foretopmast, became unmanageable and threw the vessels behind her out of order. Thus the six in front were exposed to the fire of all the French, who ran past them and went off. Byng could have prevented them by bearing down, but refused to alter the formation of his fleet. Being now much disturbed by the crippled state of the ships in his van, he made no effort either to land the soldiers he had on board or to renew the action; and after holding a council of war on the 24th of May, which confirmed his own desire to retreat, he sailed for Gibraltar (see Byng, John, for his trial and execution). The loss of Minorca, which was the consequence of this retreat, gave the French a great advantage in the Mediterranean. During the rest of the year no very vigorous measures were taken on either side, though the British government reinforced its squadrons both in the Mediterranean and on the coast of America.

In 1757 the naval war began to be pushed with a vigour hitherto unprecedented. The elder Pitt became the effective head of the government, and was able to set about ruining the French power at sea. Owing to the long neglect of the French navy, it was so inferior in strength to the British that nothing short of the worst mismanagement on Pitt’s part could have deprived Great Britain of victory. Some of the minister’s measures were not indeed wise. He sent out, during the last months of 1757 and the whole of 1758, a series of combined expeditions against the French coast, which were costly and for the most part unsuccessful. They terminated in September 1758 with a disaster to the troops engaged in St Cas Bay. Yet these assaults on the French coast did much to revive the spirit of the nation, by removing the fear of invasion. Meanwhile a sound aggressive policy was followed in distant seas during 1758.

In the East Indies the squadron which had been engaged during 1757 in co-operating with Clive in the conquest of Bengal was strengthened. Under the command of Sir George Pocock it was employed against the French squadron of M. d’Aché, who brought a body of troops from Europe under General Lafly-Tollendal to attack the possessions of the East India Company on the Coromandel coast. The two actions fought at sea on the 29th of April and the 1st of August in the Bay of Bengal were not victories for Sir George Pocock, but neither were they defeats. The French admiral was so uncertain of his power to overcome his opponent that he sailed for the islands of the Indian Ocean so soon as Lally and the authorities at Pondicherry would allow him to go. In America the strong squadron of Boscawen rendered possible the capture of Louisburg, on the 26th of July, and cleared the way for the conquest of Canada in the following year. During 1759 the French government, trusting that the multiplicity of the calls upon its fleet would compel Great Britain to scatter its naval forces, laid plans for a great invasion (for the details of this plan and its results, see Quiberon, Battle of). But the British navy proved numerous enough not only to baffle invasion at home but to effect large conquests of French posses- sions abroad. In North America the co-operation of the navy rendered possible the capture of Quebec by Wolfe. In the West Indies, though an attack on Martinique was repulsed, Guadaloupe was taken in January. In the East Indies the squadron of M. d’Aché reappeared in the Bay of Bengal in September. He fought another undecided action with Sir George Pocock on the 8th, and gave some small help to the French army. But the bad state of his squadron forced him to retreat soon, and the resources of the French being now exhausted in those seas, he did not reappear. The British navy was left in complete command of the Bay of Bengal and the coast of Malabar. On shore, Lally, cut off from reinforcements, was crushed, and Pondicherry fell.

During 1760 and 1761 the French fleet made no attempt to keep the sea. The British navy went on with the work of conquering French possessions. During 1760 it co-operated on the Lakes and on the St Lawrence in the final conquest of Canada. Between April and June of 1761 it covered the capture of the island of Belle-île on the French coast, which both strengthened its means for maintaining blockade and gave the British government a valuable pledge to be used for extorting concessions when the time for making peace came. The complete ruin of French merchant shipping and the collapse of the navy left the maritime population free to seek a livelihood in the privateers. Commerce-destroying was carried on by them with considerable success. The number of British merchant ships taken has been put as high as one-tenth of the whole. But this percentage was the price paid for the enormous advantage gained by the ruin of the French as commercial rivals. The merchant shipping of Great Britain increased largely in the course of the war, and from it dates her commercial predominance.

By the close of 1761 the helplessness of France at sea had been demonstrated, but the maritime war was revived for a few months by the intervention of Spain. A close alliance, known as “ the family compact,” was made between the royal houses of that country and France in the course of 1761. The secret was divulged, and Pitt would have made war on Spain at once. He was overruled and retired. So soon, however, as the treasure ships from America had reached Spain, at the close of 1761, the Spanish government declared war. Its navy was incapable of offering a serious resistance to the British, nor did it even attempt to operate at sea. The British government was left unopposed to carry out the plans which Pitt had prepared against Spain. The only aggressive movement undertaken by the Spanish government was an attack on Portugal, which was the close ally of Great Britain and gave her most useful help by allowing her the free use of Portuguese ports. As the king of Portugal refused to join the French and Spanish alliance, his country was invaded by a Spanish army. Great Britain supported her ally. A regiment of cavalry and seven battalions of foot were landed. They gained several small actions against the invaders, and had