

On December 6th, the LTV Corporation announced that the LTV Steel Mining Company's taconite plant at Hoyt Lakes, Minnesota, which had been scheduled to close next summer, would instead be shut down permanently on February 24, 2001. The cost of modernizing the plant could not be justified considering the current downturn in the North American steel industry. Enough workers would be kept on to ship stockpiled pellets, but the eventual end of LTV shipments will signal the close of pellet loading into lakers at Taconite Harbor. Then, on December 28th, the other shoe dropped, and LTV Corporation announced that, the next day, it likely would file voluntary Chapter 11 petitions. It said: "Without enforcement of our trade laws by the Administration (to end 'dumping' of foreign steel on the U.S. market -Ed.), our only hope of survival was to reorganize LTV under Chapter 11 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code, and emerge as a lower cost operation capable of competing successfully in the global steel market". At least 90 percent of the ore brought to Cleveland by ship is destined for LTV Steel.

The month of December saw a number of serious accidents on the lakes. Early on the morning of December 7th, the G-tug SUPERIOR, inbound at Ludington from Milwaukee to assist the salty INVIKEN, struck the southern section of the breakwall and went aground, with her bow ballast tank holed. SUPERIOR was refloated and arrived back in Milwaukee late on the 9th in tow of another G-tug, the ARKANSAS, after temporary hull patching was accomplished.

On December 7th, PETROLIA DESGAGNES, whilst upbound in the Seaway with diesel oil for Sarnia, lost her rudder. She was secured in the St. Zotique Anchorage on Lake St. Francois, where she was lightered by DIAMOND STAR. On the 9th, tugs OCEAN INTREPIDE and CARROL C.I towed her out of the anchorage bound for Quebec City.

On the evening of December 12th, the American Steamship Company's BUFFALO ran aground whilst backing toward the Shiras Generating Plant at Marquette, Michigan, holing her No. 5 starboard ballast tank. The same company's SAM LAUD arrived the next day to lighter the BUFFALO, permitting the latter to make her intended wharf and unload her cargo of limestone. After unloading, BUFFALO set off for Superior, and, early on the 15th, she arrived at Fraser Shipyards for repairs.

On the afternoon of December 17th, ALGORAIL was being towed up the Maumee River at Toledo but whilst in the course of passing through the draw of the Norfolk Southern's south railroad bridge, she grounded, apparently as a result of low water conditions resulting from a seche on Lake Erie. Her hull was holed, but ALGORAIL's crew was able to keep the incoming water under control. When strong winds abated that evening, ALGORAIL was moved to the Kuhlman Dock to unload her stone cargo, and she then proceeded to Sarnia for the necessary repairs.

Then, finally, on the morning of December 19th, the Lakes Shipping (Interlake Steamship) Company's KAYE E. BARKER, (a) EDWARD B. GREENE (85), (b) BENSON FORD (III)(89), struck the Shell Oil Company's fuel dock on the St. Clair River at Corunna, Ontario, causing some \$200,000-\$300,000 in damage to the dock. There was no reported damage to the ship. This was not the first time that the Shell dock has been damaged; landing there can be tricky as a result of the current in the river.

Ships and docks weren't the only objects to suffer. Mid-December snows caused delays to ship traffic at Chicago, as bridges could not be raised until the snow load was cleared. More severe problems occurred at Milwaukee on December 13th when a 200-foot section of the Hoan Bridge buckled and sagged some four feet as a result of the complete failure of two of the three steel girders supporting the section. With total collapse imminent if the third girder should fail, two marine terminals on Jones Island, directly beneath the bridge, were ordered closed, and ship traffic on the Menomonee River was halted until safety could be assured. Cracks in the third girder had been noticed six months earlier, but officials allowed the bridge to remain open.