

The financial troubles of the Oglebay Norton Company continue. On January 30 the firm's president/c.e.o. announced that, although the firm had sufficient liquidity to continue operations, it would be unable to make a substantial payment due February 2nd on senior subordinated notes, and that it might not be able to achieve the necessary restructuring without bankruptcy. Needless to say, on the next trading day following the announcement, Oglebay Norton stock dropped about 65% of its value! An association formed by the marine employees of Oglebay Norton is apparently investigating whether it might be able to purchase the ships but has not yet made any formal bid to do so.

Saved from the Oglebay Norton financial morass, much to the delight of all shipping observers, is the "Maritime" class self-unloader RICHARD REISS, which has been lying idle at Erie, Pennsylvania, for the last two seasons as a result of Oglebay Norton having purchased the Erie Sand business. It was announced at the end of January that the REISS has been acquired by the Grand River Navigation Company, which is the U.S. affiliate of Lower Lakes Towing Ltd. The ship is the third "Maritime" class vessel to join the Lower Lakes operation, CUYAHOGA and MISSISSAGI also having been built for the United States Maritime Commission's trade-in plan during World War Two, and the REISS will fit in well with her new owner's operations. The REISS, (a) ADIRONDAK (43), (b) RICHARD J. REISS (ii)(86), was built in 1943 as Hull 290 of the Great Lakes Engineering Works at River Rouge, Michigan. 620 feet in overall length, she was converted to a self-unloader in 1964, and her original steam engine was replaced by diesel power in 1976. The REISS is to be renamed, but her new name has not yet been chosen.

The latest steelmaker to fall victim to financial woes is Stelco Inc., the famous Hamilton (and Nanticoke) manufacturer of steel products. On January 29, Stelco was granted protection from its creditors under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, which will allow the company to continue operations while it develops plans to restructure. Canada's largest steel producer, Stelco attributed its problems to a deteriorating cash position and an unacceptably high cost structure. The firm reportedly lost Canadian \$168 million in the first three quarters of 2003. The survival of Stelco is important to the shipping industry, as it receives its deliveries of raw materials via lake vessels. The Stelco situation has attracted the attention of various levels of government, but so far there is no indication of any forthcoming bail-out.

On January 17, a Cessna Caravan 208, owned by Georgian Express, went down shortly after taking off from Pelee Island, bound for Windsor. All ten persons aboard the plane were killed. The icebreaker SAMUEL RISLEY was diverted to Lake Erie and, on January 30th, she succeeded in raising the crumpled fuselage of the plane, with the deceased still inside. Late that evening, the RISLEY arrived at Windsor with her grisly cargo.

Last issue, we reported that the navigation season at the Soo Locks was not to be extended beyond its January 15 closing date, but before our words actually appeared in print, an extension to January 25 was granted. Unfortunately, very shortly thereafter, the extreme cold weather arrived and serious ice problems were encountered in the St. Mary's River. The worst situation developed on January 18 when the downbound EDGAR B. SPEER became stuck at the lower end of the Neebish Rock Cut. Nine downbound vessels were trapped behind the SPEER and several of them were loaded too deeply to be re-routed down the Middle Neebish Channel which normally is used for upbound traffic. The light CASON J. CALLAWAY took cargo from the too-deep ships, allowing them to proceed, while U.S.C.G. MACKINAW, assisted by the tugs RELIANCE, MISSOURI, JOSEPH H. THOMPSON JR. and JOYCE L. VAN ENKEVORT finally succeeded in freeing the SPEER. The CALLAWAY, originally scheduled to winter at Sturgeon Bay, went instead to Superior, while the SPEER went to Milwaukee rather than Duluth. The Soo Locks did close on the 25th, but the final commercial transit was made by the downbound SAGINAW on the 23rd. (The release of the SPEER was accomplished during the afternoon of January 21.)