

It was midnight on the St. Mary's River and Capt. Constantine "Gus" Markakis aimed the *Oglebay Norton's* pilothouse floodlights forward so a photographer could take some shots of the famous Rock Cut. The setting made for a good photo, but not one that Markakis will likely need a copy of; the image in his mind of this oft-traveled channel is probably as sharp and detailed as anything recorded by the camera.

This was Markakis' last voyage as a Great Lakes mariner after 28 years with the *Oglebay Norton* fleet. The 1,000-foot *Oglebay Norton* had just crossed Lake Superior in glorious summer weather on her way to the St. Clair Detroit Edison plant with 68,000 tons of coal.

Markakis' attention to detail is well known to his former crews. Though it gave him a reputation of a taskmaster, it also earned him their respect and dedication.

"He's an excellent ship handler, there's no doubt about that, and he takes a lot of pride in the boat," said First Mate John Sarns.

As proud as he was of his ship, Markakis was known for caring just as deeply about his crew.

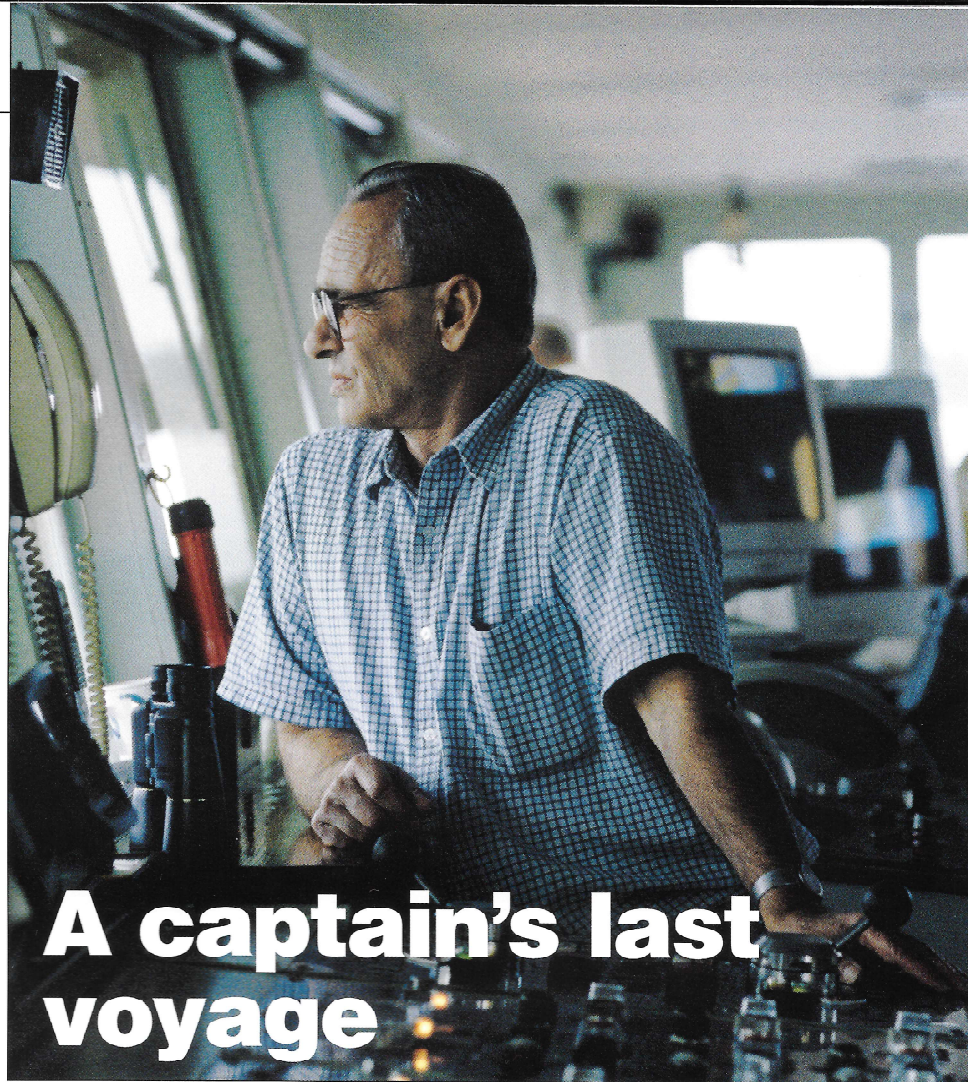
"I was worried when I came here, I'd heard he can be hard on new people," said Third Mate Pam Blusk. "But as long as he sees that you want to learn, he's fine. He was the first captain I sailed under, and he taught me a lot of valuable navigation information, and about how the ship travels in different conditions.

Markakis' love of sailing goes back to his childhood on the Greek island of Icaria. This is the island where, in Greek mythology, Icarus fell to his death after flying so high that the sun melted the wax holding his wings. "There is a rock just below my house that is supposedly where Icarus fell," Markakis said.

Markakis' father and uncles ran a ferry service using tiny boats with one-cylinder engines to shuttle passengers between the islands. His father and other relatives used those boats during World War II as part of the resistance against the Germans. He was only five years old at the time, but Markakis vividly remembers the beams of flashlights searching his home one night, when German soldiers tried to capture his father.

"We just took off," Markakis recalled. "Finally, we ended up in a cave on the other side of the island." After three hungry days in the cave, his family was able to return home and all managed to make it through the war alive.

Markakis went to sea when he was 16. He entered a nautical preparatory high school to learn navigation, seamanship and



A captain's last voyage

For proud Great Lakes shipmasters like Capt. Gus Markakis, retirement can be bittersweet

the rules of the road. The Greek maritime industry was undergoing rapid expansion at the time and there was great demand for sailors. He graduated in 1958 and by 1965 found himself second mate on the maiden voyage of a supertanker.

The new ship was completed ahead of schedule and her Greek crew found themselves with an empty ship in search of a cargo. They set out for the Persian Gulf, only to be redirected to the Suez Canal, and then the Gulf of Mexico.

"And then we got another message from the office to proceed to the St. Lawrence," Markakis said. "We didn't even have a chart for the St. Lawrence, because no one expected us to ever go there. So we got plotting sheets for that latitude, and through the coast pilot I placed the position of each lighthouse and any other mentioned landmarks, and then I joined all that and made a chart. It took me about a week to do it. It was a masterpiece by the time I finished."

Markakis stayed on the tanker for a cou-

ple of years. He found time, however, to meet his future wife, Antoinette, an American vacationing in Greece. In 1968, the couple moved to Chicago and Antoinette got a job with United States Steel, which at the time had a fleet of 42 vessels on the Great Lakes.

He applied to USS and was assigned to the steamer *Henry Phipps* as a deckhand. He didn't know what a "deckhand" was, but shortly after boarding it in Milwaukee, he figured out the position didn't warrant his briefcase, sport coat and tie. His true status became even clearer when he was shown his quarters: a small cabin shared with three other men.

"The land of opportunity, the land of automation, didn't seem anywhere near," he said.

Markakis sailed on the *Phipps* for only a few months before taking a job with Inland Steel. In 1973, he signed on with *Oglebay Norton* and received his Able Bodied Seaman's certificate.



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He worked on a number of Oglebay Norton vessels over the next decade, rising through the ranks to captain in 1978.

"I had 14 different assignments as a relief captain," he recalled. "We were paid once a month at the time, and my paycheck was two vessels behind me. Those were the days of wine and roses on the Great Lakes."

In those days, the ships were smaller, and the equipment much less sophisticated than it is today.

"Radar, phone and navigation equipment were very primitive," he said. "With the smaller vessels, you had to watch the weather closely. There were times that we were lost, and hoping to find some kind of point to get a heading."

The recession of the 1980s brought great changes, reducing the Great Lakes fleet to a third of what it had been and changing the face of the industry.

"We thought they made a grave mistake making those 1,000 footers," he said. "But, guess what? Today they are the lifeline."

One of them was indeed a lifeline for Markakis. In 1991 he was given command of the *Oglebay Norton*, the former *Lewis William Foy* which was acquired that year from Bethlehem Steel. He found the ship "neglected and tired looking." He immediately set out, with the company's support, to establish the ship as a model of excellent seamanship and superb housekeeping.

The *Oglebay Norton* has also become a pacesetter in productivity. It holds the record on the Great Lakes for the largest single stone cargo — 59,078 tons hauled in 1992 — and in 1999 moved more cargo than any other boat on the Lakes, 3,139,769 tons.

"These milestones were accomplished not by racing our competitors, but with honest and hard work, each watch, each day, and every year since 1991," he said.

On his final voyage, Markakis' crew threw him a surprise party and presented him with gifts. He, in turn, presented each of them with black caps embroidered with "*MV Oglebay Norton* 2000."

"We would like to recognize you for your many years of service and dedication to the preservation and maintenance of a vital service industry on the Great Lakes," Mark J. Rohn, *Oglebay Norton's* vice-president of terminal relations and director of human relations, told the gathering.

"It's been a very good career," said Markakis who will be splitting his retirement between homes in Boca Raton, Fla., and Greece. "I didn't make as much as a captain for Atlantic Richfield or Mobil, but enjoyed working for a small company with a great tradition in Great Lakes transportation."

Stephen Brede