

Container Pioneers

By Ulrich Cramer

A lot of people came up with new ideas - I myself came up with the MAFI "Portalift" (below)



One of the biggest questions, however, was Ro-Ro ship versus container ship?

Europe was ahead of developing freight Ro-Ro services. Together with DFDS I myself developed the first known Ro-Ro- loading platform concept for MS *Summerset* and MS *Suffolk* - below



This was followed by the MAFI-Trailer also called Rolltrailer (below)



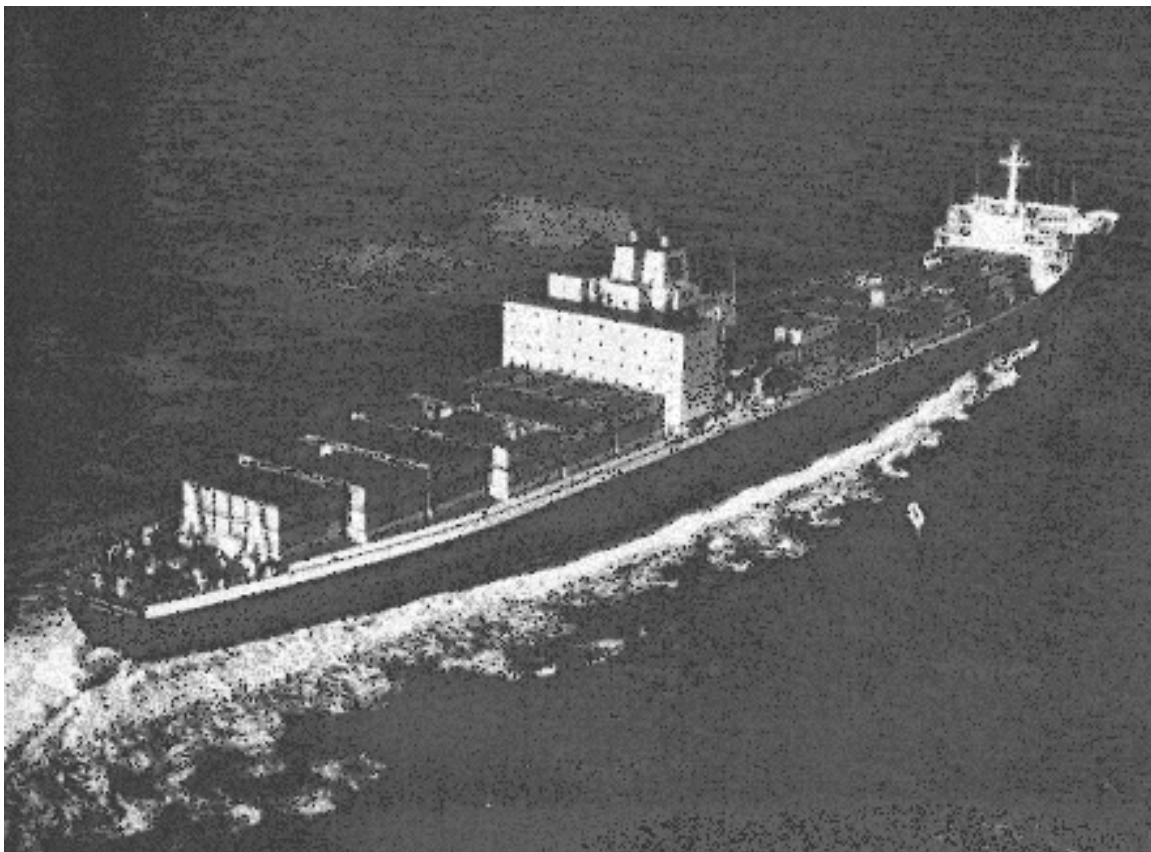
A platform with detachable goose neck and a tractor with the goose neck hitched to an elevating fifth wheel. This concept was first documented on 22 February 1966 and became a patent for MAFI in June 1969 with Ulrich Cramer as inventor.

By the way, what Malcolm McLean originally had in mind was carrying wheeled trailers on modified T2 tankers. Many years later, end of the 90th, he returned to this idea and he started “**Trailer Bridge**” as a barge Ro-Ro-service between Jacksonville/Florida and Puerto Rico with 53’ trailers.

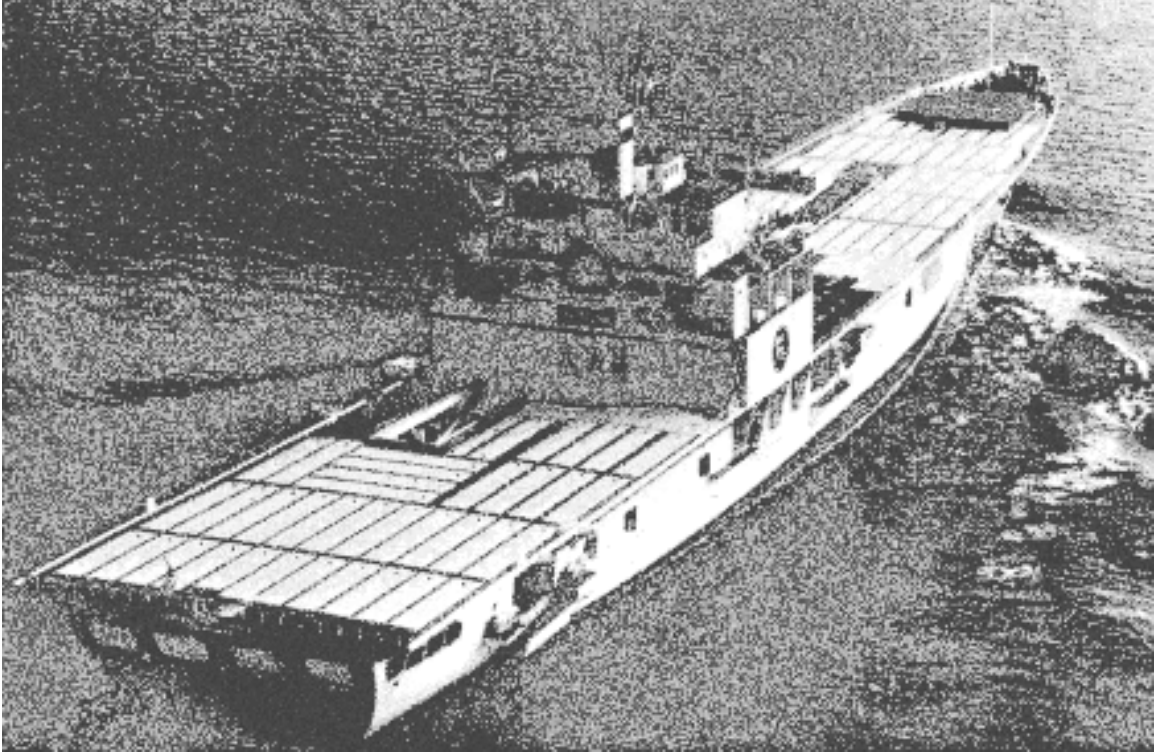
The US Navy’s transportation arm, the Military Sea Transport Service, was interested in the Ro-Ro-concept. In 1958 the **MS Comet** was delivered to MSTS. In April 1967 the second Ro-Ro vessel was delivered to MSTS, the **MS Sea Lif**, and in December 1968 the **Admiral Wm. Callaghan**.

In Europe the development of containerships went into this direction. Early 1967 the first European container ship, **MS Atlantic Span** from ACL called Port Newark.

In America, the first cellular container ship new buildings came into service - in 1970 Seatrain gas turbine powered container ships built at Rheinstahl Nordseewerke in Emden/Germany and SEA LAND’s SL 7 class container ships with s.s. 33 kn.



How undecided the shipping industry was those days is marked by the development of Ro-Ro trailer ships.



In March 1968, the *Ponce de Leon*, the first American designed and built trailer ship (above), was the first of several Ro-Ro ships with side access ramps put into service between USEC and Puerto Rico.

In 1973, Matson line bought similar ships to balance their wheeled and “containerizable” cargo, the *Matsonia* and the *Lurline*. Since 1975, such types of Ro-Ro container ships have been employed in the USWC – Alaska service. Today some of these ships have been relocated to the Florida – Puerto Rico service under the name of SEASTAR.

The development of early container ships in Europe during the 1960s and 1970s is another story. the first sailing of the Atlantic Span in April 1967 means that it will soon be the 40th anniversary of this development. I plan to write a special report in the near future