



*The UT745 Maersk Feeder at an offshore installation. Modern platform ships can remain in position in weather which prevents the offshore cranes from operating. Picture: Victor Gibson.*

Once confidence in the joystick crew, shipmasters began to operate beam on to the installations, giving the cranes access to much larger areas of the deck, and it was this development which allowed the pipe-carriers with their long decks and therefore higher carrying capacity to become platform supply vessels. This process did not carry over into the Gulf of Mexico, where the supply vessels were still being built with decks less than one hundred feet long, and where it was still normal for the ships to tie up. Even where the water was considered to be too deep for anchoring, the ships would still back up and tie up with two ropes, replacing the restraint of the anchor chain with a bit of ahead on the engines. Of course such a technique would have been almost impossible to carry out in places with strong tides or currents such as the southern North Sea and the waters of Trinidad.

The availability of the complete length of the deck to the crane caused a proliferation in the technique of "cherry picking", the management of the unit being serviced identifying individual containers in the stow. The deck crew would climb over the top of the stow and hook the required lifts on, and then stand back as the crane lifted them into the air. Of course there were dangers. The crew members could fall into the holes which had been left, or even over the side into the sea.