

Nunivak, 1899

An island off Western Alaska in the Bering Sea. It is the second largest island in the Bering Sea. Fogbound most of the year, Nunivak is covered with low vegetation and has a small native population engaged in hunting and fishing. Reindeer and musk oxen have been introduced as part of a national wildlife refuge there. The island was discovered in 1821 by Russian explorers.



U.S.S. *Nunivak* tied up to a makeshift dock somewhere on the Yukon River, no date.

Builder: William H. Birch and Company, San Francisco

Cost: \$32,620

Commissioned: 1 May 1899

Decommissioned: 1901

Disposition: Sold

Length: 209'

Beam: 35'

Draft: 4' 6" (full load); 2' 6" (empty)

Displacement: 486 tons

Propulsion: 2 tandem 650 hp compound-expansion steam engines, 2 locomotive boilers (capable of burning wood or coal), stern paddle wheel

Performance:

Max: 12 knots

Economic: 8 knots

Deck Gear: Boom

Complement: 7 commissioned officers, 4 petty officers "of the first class", 30 enlisted.

Armament: 2 x 1-pounder Driggs-Schroeder rapid-fire rifles; assorted small arms.

Misc.: Electric lighting provided throughout; heating available by steam or stoves.

History:

The *Nunivak* was a stern-paddle wheel river boat built "for duty as a revenue cutter and patrol boat" for service on the Yukon River by William H. Birch and Company in San Francisco. First Lieutenant John C. Cantwell, USRCS, was assigned on 4 April 1899 as her first and only commanding officer. She was launched on 23 June 1898. She was placed in commission on 1 May 1899 and was ordered towed to Seattle by the cutter *Rush*. The cutters departed San Francisco on 6 May but anchored in Humbolt Harbor as the *Nunivak* was "leaking badly, hog chains and towline parted. Oakum spewed out of seams." After some repairs the cutters departed for Seattle, arriving there on 24 May 1899. They departed Seattle on 10 June 1899 bound for Port Townsend. They arrived at St. Michael, Alaska on 6 July 1899.

The *Nunivak* was ordered to be put up for sale on 3 May 1901, after serving less than two years. She was sold to W. D. Hofius and Company, Seattle, for \$5,000.

[Click here](#) for to access a pdf copy of her commanding officer's report of her operations from 1899-1901 entitled: *Report of the Operations of the U.S. Revenue Steamer Nunivak on the Yukon River Station, Alaska, 1899-1901*, by First Lieutenant J. C. Cantwell, R.C.S., Commanding (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Officer, 1902), provided courtesy of Google Books.

Sources:

Cutter History File. USCG Historian's Office, USCG HQ, Washington, D.C.

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First Lieutenant J. C. Cantwell, R.C.S., *Report of the Operations of the U.S. Revenue Steamer Nunivak on the Yukon River Station, Alaska, 1899-1901*, by Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Officer, 1902.

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