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RN bids OSI anchors aweigh

B.C. firm to supply British ships with ID systems

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A North Vancouver navigation-technology company has made a key breakthrough into the European marketplace after being chosen to supply warship automatic identification systems (WAIS) to Great Britain's Royal Navy.

OSI Geospatial Inc. said yesterday that it has been selected as the preferred bidder for the contract, valued at approximately \$29 million US, including all options.

The deal is expected to be signed by the end of the month.

OSI was chosen from six bidders, including major military contractors BAE Systems and Lockheed Martin.

Wayne Hoyle, vice-president and general manager for international operations for OSI, said the contract is the largest in the company's 29-year history and expects it to drive further business with Britain's Ministry of Defence as well as other international customers.

"It is certainly a major coup to position ourselves to win this," said Hoyle, whose publicly traded company employs 160 -- about half of those in North Vancouver.

"It's a very significant shift for us. In the past we have had work with the Royal Navy, but were a sub-contractor," he said.

"This really moves our systems into the operations room of the ships, which is really where the



CREDIT: Wayne Leidenfrost, The Province

OSI Geospatial's Wayne Hoyle demonstrates the WAIS technology that has put his North Vancouver company's foot in the door for major military-procurement contracts.



growth of our company is coming from. With the Royal Navy being the first to embrace the WAIS, we are seeing interest from other navies."

The ship-identification systems are capable of transmitting a commercial ship's transponder signal to send information such as identification, position, course and speed to other ships and to shore-based facilities to provide enhanced situational awareness and increased surveillance capability.

It's the latter capability that the Royal Navy will use in the Persian Gulf.

Put simply, the WAIS system takes the transponder information from a particular vessel and checks it with databases to ensure the identification is not suspicious.

For example, if a beacon identifies a certain vessel type that is capable of a top speed of 22 knots, but the vessel is traveling at 28 knots, a red flag would be raised in the system.

The system "correlates all that information and allows navies to identify vessels of particular interest and decide whether they should be boarded," he added.

"This is a tool to help them identify which ships they should spend their time boarding and to coordinate the activities efficiently in any particular area."

He said the system allows the same breadth and depth of information to be available in a naval ship's operations room as on its bridge.

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