

Northumberland space start-up NORSS acquired by US defence giant Raytheon

American defence giant Raytheon has acquired a 22-strong space technology company based in Alnwick, in an undisclosed deal.

The UK arm of the aerospace and defence multinational said it intends to buy Northern Space and Security Ltd, or NORSS, in a move the start-up's founder says will facilitate expansion. RAF veteran Ralph Dinsley founded the firm – which delivers orbital analyst technical services to the MoD – five years ago.

Since then it has grown, and earlier this year secured a contract with UK Space Command worth nearly £1m to develop a new simulator system for testing future British satellite launches. Mr Dinsley said the deal with Raytheon UK would facilitate expansion of the Northumberland firm given access to new international markets.

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Jeff Lewis, chief executive of Raytheon UK, said: “Bringing together the complementary capabilities of these two leading space companies will enhance the quality of the UK's orbital analysis and space situational awareness technologies. It also answers a call made by the UK Government for companies to invest in cutting-edge space technologies.”

Raytheon said NORSS services, which include “space domain awareness”, orbital analysis, space surveillance and tracking, would help it navigate increasing congestion in space as tens of thousands of new satellites are said to be scheduled for launch in the next five years.

Mr Dinsley said: “The acquisition, upon completion, will facilitate expansion by NORSS through access into new markets. As part of Raytheon Intelligence & Space, we will have expanded access to international markets, continued investments in research and development, and opportunities to collaborate on the next generation of space technologies.”

Earlier this week Raytheon announced plans to open a laser weaponry hub in Scotland, to be used for the testing, fielding and maintenance of lasers capable of shooting down drones, rockets, artillery and mortars. The firm said the conflict in Ukraine had highlighted the need for such technology.

NORSS operates its LEO Optical Camera Installation (LOCI) from Kielder Forest, Northumberland in a unique collaboration with the Kielder Observatory. It says the technology will revolutionise the management of satellites on orbit.

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