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US spies: N. Korea constructing missiles

The Washington Post

U.S. spy agencies are seeing signs that North Korea is constructing new missiles at a factory that produced the country's first intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of reaching the United States, according to officials familiar with the intelligence.

Newly obtained evidence, including satellite photos taken in recent weeks, indicates that work is underway on at least one and possibly two liquid-fueled ICBMs at a large research facility in Sanumdong, on the outskirts of Pyongyang, according to the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe classified intelligence.

The findings are the latest to show ongoing activity inside North Korea's nuclear and missile facilities at a time when the country's leaders are engaged in arms talks with the United States. The new intelligence does not suggest an expansion of

North Korea's capabilities but shows that work on advanced weapons is continuing weeks after President Donald Trump declared in a Twitter posting that Pyongyang was "no longer a Nuclear Threat."

The reports about new missile construction come after recent revelations about a suspected uranium enrichment facility, called Kangson, that North Korea is operating in secret. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo acknowledged during Senate testimony last week that North Korean factories "continue to produce fissile material" used in making nuclear weapons. He declined to say whether Pyongyang is building new missiles.

During a summit with Trump in June, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un agreed to a vaguely worded pledge to "work toward" the "denuclearization" of the Korean Peninsula. But since then, North Korea has made few tangible moves signaling an in-

tention to disarm.

Instead, senior North Korean officials have discussed their intention to deceive Washington about the number of nuclear warheads and missiles they have, as well as the types and numbers of facilities, and to rebuff international inspectors, according to intelligence gathered by U.S. agencies. Their strategy includes potentially asserting that they have fully denuclearized by declaring and disposing of 20 warheads while retaining dozens more.

The Sanumdong factory has produced two of North Korea's ICBMs, including the powerful Hwasong-15, the first with a proven range that could allow it to strike the U.S. East Coast. The newly obtained evidence points to ongoing work on at least one Hwasong-15 at the Sanumdong plant, according to imagery collected by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency in recent weeks.

SIGAR sees stalemate in Afghan fighting

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghan security forces are fighting Taliban insurgents to a stalemate, a U.S. government watchdog said in a new report.

The Afghan government controlled or influenced about 56 percent of the country's 407 districts as of May 15, the same number as last quarter. Meanwhile, insurgents lost control or influence in three districts.

The figures, provided by U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, were in a report issued late Monday by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, or SIGAR. It also said the number of people living under government and insurgent control remained the same over the last quarter despite an intense aerial campaign by U.S. and Afghan forces.

The government in Kabul aims to win control or influence territory where 80 percent of the country's population lives by the end of next year. As of mid-May, 65 percent of Afghans lived in such areas, SIGAR said.

The report also highlighted continuing manning shortfalls in the government's security forces.

"According to Afghan-reported force-strength data, [Afghan forces] may have increased in size since last quarter to 314,242 personnel, but the force has lost 8,500 personnel since April 2017, and 5,353 since April 2016," SIGAR said, adding that Afghan forces were only 89.3 percent of their goal strength.

Congress created SIGAR in 2008 to provide independent oversight of U.S.-funded reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Since 2002, Washington has ap-

propriated roughly \$126 billion for relief and reconstruction in the country, most of which has been spent on security.

SIGAR reiterated its call for certain data to be declassified to help better gauge the success of U.S. efforts in the country.

Casualty figures and exact attrition rates among Afghan troops and police, as well as data on the state of their equipment, are being withheld from the public, SIGAR said.

The number of targets associated with Taliban financing and an assessment of revenue denied to the insurgency because of U.S. airstrikes is also being kept secret, SIGAR said.

Under the Trump administration's South Asia strategy, the U.S. has intensified airstrikes, dropping almost 3,000 munitions over the country during the first half of 2018 — a higher number for that period than during the surge of 2010,

when about 100,000 American troops were in Afghanistan.

Under new rules, the U.S. has been targeting drug labs used by the Taliban to generate revenue. U.S. military officials say the ongoing strikes have cost the Taliban \$220 million.

SIGAR, however, has questioned that figure and whether the drug lab attacks — which have included American B-52 and F-22 aircraft and Afghan A-29s, as well as artillery rocket systems — would have any lasting impact.

"Operating these aircraft costs anywhere from \$9,798 per hour for an F/A-18 to \$35,294 per hour for an F-22 ... destroyed labs, on the other hand, are quickly and easily replaced with minimal cost."

Washington's aim is to push the Taliban to the negotiating table and bring an end to America's longest war, now in its 17th year.

Facebook uncovers disinformation operation

The Washington Post

Facebook said Tuesday that it had discovered a sophisticated coordinated disinformation operation on its platform involving 32 false pages and profiles engaging in divisive messaging ahead of the U.S. midterm elections.

The social media company said that it couldn't tie the activity to Russia, which interfered on its platform around the 2016 presidential election. But Facebook said the profiles shared a pattern of behavior with the previous Russian disinformation campaign, which was led by a group called the Internet Research Agency.

Facebook briefed congressional aides.

A congressional aide said there's no evi-

dence that political candidates were targeted in the new disinformation effort, but that pages and accounts sought to spread politically divisive content around social issues.

"It's clear that whoever set up these accounts went to much greater lengths to obscure their true identities than the Russian-based Internet Research Agency (IRA) has in the past," Facebook said in a post.

"We believe this could be partly due to changes we've made over the last year to make this kind of abuse much harder. But security is not something that's ever done. We face determined, well-funded adversaries who will never give up and are constantly changing tactics. It's an arms race

and we need to constantly improve too."

In particular, the pages promoted an event pegged as a counter-rally to a far-right march scheduled for next weekend in Washington.

Facebook said that the urgency of the upcoming rally prompted them to publicize the information, even though it is in the early stages of an investigation.

The company, which identified the pages two weeks ago and has since removed them, said in June that it had found no such activity.

The 32 pages found had up to 18,000 followers. There was no specific evidence that political candidates were targeted, but one account followed an IRA-associated account for a brief period of time.

Kelly to remain as Trump's chief of staff

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Embattled White House Chief of Staff John Kelly has told senior aides that President Donald Trump asked him to stay in his role through 2020.

Kelly told staffers that he had agreed to stay on, five White House officials said Tuesday. The public show of confidence in Kelly, even if later reversed, appeared aimed at tamping down speculation about staff turnover, as well as projecting calm as the president gears up for his re-election campaign.

The officials were not authorized to speak publicly about private conversations.

Kelly hit the one-year mark as Trump's chief of staff Monday. Speculation about his exit has flared for months amid reports that Trump had cooled on the retired four-star general. Kelly is credited with bringing order to the West Wing but also grates on the freewheeling president.

Still, Trump is known as a mercurial boss, whose feelings on key staffers can shift rapidly. Trump on Monday tweeted congratulations to Kelly on reaching the one-year milestone.

Speculation about Kelly's exit hit a fever pitch about a month ago, with Trump openly weighing possible replacements. At the time, Kelly made clear to confidants that

he had no plans to leave, though he had also told people close to him that he'd be happy if he made it to the one-year mark.

Kelly has often joked publicly about how working for Trump is the hardest job he's ever had, including those on the battlefield.

Trump has grown increasingly frustrated with news reports about staff turnover and discord, often dubbing it "fake news," though there has been a historic level of turnover during his first two years in office. The White House has struggled to recruit top talent across the administration to replace departing staffers.

Man who impersonated Army general sentenced

The (Raleigh, N.C.) News & Observer

RALEIGH, N.C. — Christian Desgroux, the Raleigh auto mechanic who posed as a U.S. Army general and piloted a helicopter to the SAS campus in Cary to impress a woman, received a six-month sentence in federal prison Tuesday, federal prosecutors said.

U.S. District Judge Terrence Boyle handed down the sentence in Raleigh after Desgroux's guilty plea in June. The 58-year-old was also sentenced to a year of supervised release.

He had faced a maximum sentence of three years and a \$250,000 fine.

In February, an agent with the Department of Homeland Security testified Desgroux took a helicopter to SAS headquarters in November, wearing a battle dress uniform and identifying himself as an Army general. He told security officers that he was picking up a female employee on orders of President Donald Trump.

While at the SAS campus in Cary, Desgroux told security officers that he had come to take the woman to a classified meeting at Fort Bragg, then flew away with her for approximately 30 minutes before returning to Cary, agent Tony Bell said.

When he later interviewed the employee, Bell testified, she said she assumed Des-

groux, then 57, was trying to impress her and start a romantic relationship.

"She said they did nothing," Bell said in February. "They flew around for 30 minutes. She had no idea he was flying a helicopter to pick her up."

Bell testified that Desgroux had chartered the helicopter out of Charlotte and told the pilot he had authorization to land at SAS.

When it touched down on the software company's soccer field, Bell said, Desgroux immediately jumped out wearing a uniform and combat patches and three stars, though he had never served in the U.S. Army.

Veterans group urges halt to 3D printed guns

By NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A group of veterans who advise the largest gun control advocacy organization in the United States urged the State Department to halt its plans to allow downloadable designs for 3D-printed guns to be published online.

The Veterans Advisory Council for Everytown for Gun Safety described the printable, hard-to-trace guns as a threat to national security and public safety. In a letter, 15 veterans on the council called on Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to step in and block blueprints to manufacture the guns from being posted online, which is slated to start Wednesday.

“We know firsthand the destructive power of firearms — and the dangers of firearms in the wrong hands,” the veterans wrote to Pompeo.

In 2013, the State Department stopped the Texas-based company Defense Distrib-

uted from publishing gun blueprints, arguing it violated federal export laws because some of them were downloaded outside the United States.

In late June, the federal government reached a settlement with the company to allow it to resume posting the designs. The settlement allows Defense Distributed to start posting the blueprints online Wednesday, but as of Sunday 1,000 people had already downloaded the plans for AR-15-style, semi-automatic assault rifles, according to Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro.

Pennsylvania was one of eight states to file a lawsuit Monday against President Donald Trump’s administration over its decision to allow distribution of the blueprints. In a separate move, 21 state attorneys general called on Pompeo and U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions to back out of their settlement with the company.

On Tuesday, Democrats in the Senate introduced legislation in a last-ditch effort to

continue the ban on printable guns. During a news conference at the Capitol, the lawmakers described it as a “deadly mistake” and a “self-inflicted public safety crisis.”

“Coming to a theater near you, coming to a school near you, coming to a sports stadium, to any public place,” Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., said while pointing to an image of a 3D printed semi-automatic assault rifle. “These ghost guns are the new wave of American gun violence. The failure to ban them will mean blood on the hands of officials who have that responsibility.”

Trump addressed the issue on Twitter on Tuesday morning and tweeted: “I am looking into 3-D Plastic Guns being sold to the public. Already spoke to NRA, doesn’t seem to make much sense!”

Later Tuesday, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., criticized Trump for waiting to look into it until the day before the blueprints were scheduled to go online.

Wildfires threaten 10,000 homes in N. Calif.

Associated Press

LAKEPORT, Calif. — Twin wildfires tearing through vineyards and brushy hills threatened some 10,000 homes in Northern California on Tuesday — yet another front in the seemingly endless summer of wildfires that have ravaged some of the most scenic areas of the state.

The two fires straddling Mendocino and Lake counties had burned seven homes by Monday night along with some 107 square miles of rural land.

About 100 miles north, the so-called Carr Fire that has burned more than 800 homes and killed six people has become the ninth-most destructive wildfire in California history, said Scott McLean, a spokesman for the California Department of Forestry and

Fire Protection.

In Lake County, evacuation orders were in effect for the 4,700-resident town of Lakeport along with some smaller communities and a section of Mendocino National Forest. In all, some 10,000 people have been warned to flee, fire officials said.

Lakeport, north of San Francisco, is the county seat and a popular destination for bass anglers and boaters on the shores of Clear Lake. By Monday night it was a ghost town, the main streets deserted.

A few miles away embers, ash and smoke swirled through vineyards where at least one home had gone up in flames. Firefighters set blazes at the bottom of hills to burn up the tinder-dry brush before flames cresting the ridge tops could feed on it and surge downhill. A fleet of aircraft made

continuous water and fire retardant drops on the blaze.

Not everyone heeded orders issued Sunday and Monday to evacuate.

Derick Hughes II remained behind at his property in Nice, Calif., where he ran sprinklers on his roof and removed yard plants that could catch fire.

The 32-year-old Marine Corps veteran sent his wife and two daughters to safety along with three carloads of belongings. But he said he had too much at stake to leave. He bought his three-bedroom house last year using a loan from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“This is everything I bled for, and I’ve worked really hard to get to where I am, and I’m just not willing to give it up so easily,” he said over the phone.

Prosecutor says Minneapolis police shooting justified

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Two Minneapolis police officers who shot and killed a black man last month were justified in using deadly force, a prosecutor announced Monday, saying the man was fleeing police and turned toward them with a loaded gun before he was shot.

Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman said Thurman Blevins had refused

commands to stop and show his hands, and was clearly a danger to the officers and community. “Their decision to use deadly force against Mr. Blevins under those circumstances was authorized,” Freeman said, adding that the officers will not be criminally charged.

His statements were in prepared remarks that were handed out to the media. Freeman had tried to make the announcement during a news conference, but he was

shouted down by Blevins’ friends and family members. They argue Blevins was no threat to anybody and was just sitting with a woman and his child.

“He was forced to run away from his family so they wouldn’t shoot him down in his own community in front of his kid,” said Sydnee Brown, a cousin.

Freeman’s decision came after the city released the officers’ body-camera video late Sunday.

Chinese radio warnings concern Philippines

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippines has expressed concern to China over an increasing number of Chinese radio messages warning Philippine aircraft and ships to stay away from newly fortified islands and other territories in the South China Sea claimed by both countries, officials said Monday.

A Philippine government report seen by The Associated Press showed that in the second half of last year, Philippine military aircraft received Chinese radio warnings at least 46 times while patrolling near artificial islands built by China in the South China Sea's Spratly archipelago.

The Chinese radio messages were "meant to step up their tactics to our pilots conducting maritime air surveillance in the West Philippine Sea," the report said, using the Philippine name for the South China Sea.

Philippine officials have raised their concern twice over the radio transmissions, including in a meeting with Chinese counterparts in Manila earlier this year that focused on the Asian countries' long-unresolved territorial disputes, according to two officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the issue publicly.

It's a new problem that emerged after China transformed seven disputed reefs into islands using dredged sand in the Spratlys, where the new islands now stand

in close proximity to islands occupied by Vietnam, the Philippines and Taiwan. Malaysia and Brunei are the other claimants to the chain of islands and barren islets and atolls.

The messages originated from Chinese coast guard ships in past years, but military officials suspect transmissions now are also being sent from the Beijing-held artificial islands, where far more powerful communications and surveillance equipment has been installed along with weapons such as surface-to-air missiles.

"Our ships and aircraft have observed an increase in radio queries that appear to originate from new land-based facilities in the South China Sea," Commander Clay Doss, public affairs officer of the U.S. 7th Fleet, told the AP by email in response to questions about the Chinese messages.

"These communications do not affect our operations," Doss said.

Although the U.S. lays no claims to the strategic waterway, its Navy has deployed ships and aircraft in operations to promote freedom of navigation and overflight, but which China protests as foreign meddling in an Asian dispute.

U.S. Navy ships and aircraft communicate routinely with regional navies, including the Chinese navy. "The vast majority of these communications are professional, and when that is not the case, those issues are addressed by appropriate diplomatic and military channels," Doss said.

Bomb kills at least 11 in Philippines

Associated Press

LAMITAN, Philippines — A bomb-laden van driven by a suspected Abu Sayyaf militant went off in a powerful blast Tuesday that killed 11 people, including a soldier, five militiamen and the driver in a brazen attack that reignited terrorism fears in the southern Philippines.

Regional military spokesman Lt. Col. Gerry Besana said six army scout rangers and a militiaman were wounded in the explosion after dawn outside an army militia outpost that tore a crater on the road and damaged the outpost in Lamitan city in one of the worst terrorist attacks in the country this year.

Militiamen, who have been alerted to possible bombings, stopped the van at a checkpoint in Colonia village, where the bomb went off, military officials said.

"If he triggered the bomb, he was probably waiting for a more opportune time to inflict harm on a bigger number of people," Besana said by phone, referring to the driver, who died in the blast. "That's their death wish — the more, the merrier."

The Philippine government condemned the terrorist attack, calling it a "war crime."

Investigators have yet to determine if the bomb or bombs were being carried in the van or the vehicle had been turned into a car bomb, Besana said, adding it was also unclear if the explosive was remotely detonated or was set off by the driver in a suicide attack.

Bus bombing in Afghanistan kills at least 17

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — A roadside bombing hit a passenger bus in western Afghanistan on Tuesday, killing at least 17 people, as militants launched a coordinated attack on a city in the country's east where initial reports said four people were killed, according to officials.

The morning attack in western Farah province took place in the Bala Buluk district and also wounded 31 people, all civilians, according to Abdul Jabar Shahiq, the provincial

health department chief.

The bus was on its way from Herat province toward the capital, Kabul, when it hit the roadside bomb, Shahiq said, adding that women and children were among the casualties.

Details were slowly emerging on the attack in eastern Afghanistan, where militants launched a coordinated assault in the city of Jalalabad, the Nangarhar provincial capital, local officials said.

Initial reports said four people were killed and at least eight were wounded, including

two policemen.

The militants targeted the Jalalabad government building of the refugee and repatriation department, according to Gen. Ghulam Sanayee Stanikzai, the provincial police chief.

Stanikzai and Gov. Hayatullah Hayat said Afghan forces killed two militants during the battle.

Zabihullah Zemarai, a member of the provincial council, said the attack started with a car bombing — likely an explosion set off by a suicide car bomber — near the city's provincial

hospital and health department, followed by gunfire.

Afghan forces reacted quickly and rescued all participants of a meeting of nongovernmental organizations that was taking place in the nearby building as well as the head of the refugee department, said Attahullah Khogyani, Hayat's spokesman.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks. In Nangarhar, both the Taliban insurgents and Islamic State have been active.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman aims to be 'chief donut officer'

CT WALLINGFORD — There are a great many career paths to be chosen in 2018. But for one Connecticut woman, “chief donut officer” is the dream.

Gina Nero, 37, of Wallingford, is one of the five finalists vying for the title in a contest by famed baker Entenmann's.

The 120-year-old company is selecting one person to receive the honorary title, doughnut company gear, \$5,000 and a year's supply of the company's doughnuts.

The public will have a chance to vote for their favorite candidate on the Entenmann's website until Aug 7.

Lawn mower seen as cause of house fire

VT MORRISTOWN — Vermont State Police said a lawn mower appears to have caused a shed fire that spread to a propane tank and house.

Police said a passer-by saw the house fire in Morristown on Saturday night and alerted the couple inside to get out. A firefighter was treated for minor injuries after falling down a set of stairs in the house while fighting the fire.

Police said the homeowner had just finished cutting the lawn and had parked the mower inside the shed, which caught fire. The fire spread to a propane tank and then to the house.

The home sustained serious damage to the back side.

Firefighters put out flames at station

NE OMAHA — Firefighters from a northwest

Omaha station put out a fire that erupted at another Omaha fire station.

A battalion chief caught a whiff of smoke at the station a little after 10 a.m. Sunday and found the station kitchen ablaze. He called for help because most of the firefighters assigned there were out on a call.

Fire crews from a station less than 5 miles away responded. It took about 15 minutes to put out the fire in the kitchen and living areas. No injuries were reported.

Most of the station's firefighters and equipment were moved temporarily to another station.

Man makes beer run with alligator in hand

FL JACKSONVILLE — A man made a beer run into a Florida convenience store carrying a live alligator with its mouth taped shut.

Video posted by television station WTLV shows the unidentified man walking into the Jacksonville store holding the alligator with his right hand.

He sees someone in the back of the store and says, “Is he taking the last bit of beer? You aren't taking the last bit of beer, are you?”

The man with the gator jokingly runs at the other man as people in the store laugh. He then grabs a 12-pack of beer.

The television station said Florida wildlife investigators are looking into the incident.

3 jump off bridge; 1 dies from injuries

PA PITTSBURGH — Three men jumped off a truss bridge spanning a river in Pittsburgh over the weekend, and one died.

Police said the men weren't trying to take their own lives

but didn't elaborate on why the trio jumped off the Hot Metal Bridge on Sunday night.

First responders found the men in the Monongahela River about 8:40 p.m. One of them had injuries and was having difficulty swimming.

Police said that 25-year-old man died later at a hospital.

The other men were uninjured. No charges have been filed.

Stolen Mighty Mouse sculpture returned

KS WICHITA — A Wichita artist said he's elated that a sculpture of Mighty Mouse that was stolen from his home has been returned.

Christopher Gulick said the 200-pound wooden sculpture was taken from his front porch July 25. Another artist gave him the sculpture more than 20 years ago.

KSNW-TV reported a Wichita resident called police after discovering the mouse in his yard Sunday.

Gulick said he's glad to have Mighty Mouse back but he will have to do some work to repair parts that were damaged

Valuable painting returns to town

MA NORTH ATTLEBOROUGH — A valuable painting that hung unnoticed in a Massachusetts school for decades is coming back to town after 11 years in storage and following a fight over whether to sell it.

The Sun Chronicle reported the piece by Russian artist Alexandre Iacovleff, titled “Afghans,” would be returned to North Attleborough on Tuesday and will be displayed in the police station's lobby.

The painting was donated to the town in 1951 and hung

in a school until 2007, when a resident brought its value to the attention of officials. The town wanted to sell it and to use the money to fund art education. It could have fetched as much as \$2 million.

A relative of the donors objected.

Vandals damage 114 cemetery gravestones

WI MERRILL — Police in north-central Wisconsin are looking for the vandals who damaged more than 100 gravestones at a cemetery last weekend.

Police in Merrill believe the damage happened Friday night. The damage was discovered Saturday morning. Police said Sunday they had no suspects or leads.

The Wausau Daily Herald reports 114 gravestones were damaged at Merrill Memorial Park Cemetery.

New Orleans band's equipment is stolen

LA NEW ORLEANS — A local New Orleans funk band said its equipment was stolen near a popular bar in the city's Uptown area.

News outlets reported the New Orleans Suspects said in a Facebook post last month that their equipment was taken from their van while it was parked around the corner from the Maple Leaf Bar.

The band set up a GoFundMe page to raise money to replace the gear. The group listed some of the items it lost on the fundraising site including keyboards, guitar amps and a custom drum kit.

The Suspects began playing together in 2009.

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Cowboys' Elliott playing more relaxed

Associated Press

OXNARD, Calif. — Ezekiel Elliott never has offered much about his state of mind at training camp a year ago when the star running back of the Dallas Cowboys faced the possibility of a suspension over domestic violence allegations.

So let his position coach explain the difference now that the drama is gone.

"You go at this time last year, he's very stressed out," running backs coach Gary Brown said. "Wasn't himself. Looked big. Now he looks happy and jubilant and lean and just going out there and having some fun. So it's a completely different Zeke than it was last year."

The six-game suspension was announced while the Cowboys were in California last year. Elliott's legal team sued after the club returned to Texas, sparking a two-month court fight that finally ended with the 2016 NFL rushing leader serving the ban halfway through the season.

Elliott had an uneven start last year before looking more

like the rookie sensation who helped lead the Cowboys to an NFC-best 13 wins alongside quarterback Dak Prescott, the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year on that playoff team. Then Elliott ran out of legal options, the Cowboys lost three straight games and Dallas ultimately missed the postseason at 9-7.

There isn't any waiting and wondering now.

"I am just ready to go out there and prove myself and be the running back I am for this team," Elliott said in his first meeting with reporters at camp. "And go out there and have a good year."

The suspension wasn't the only thing that had Elliott in the headlines last year.

There was video of him pulling down a woman's shirt during a St. Patrick's Day parade in Dallas. The NFL cited that incident in its letter detailing his punishment while saying it didn't play a role in the outcome of a yearlong investigation conducted despite prosecutors in Ohio not pursuing the case. Elliott also was linked to a fight

outside a bar not long before the team reported to California last July, although his name didn't appear in the police report detailing the incident.

This offseason came and went without any significant headlines.

"I am being more cautious, more focused on my game," said Elliott, who turned 23 last week. "And focused on having a good year."

After leading the league with 1,631 yards rushing in 2016, Elliott had the best per-game rushing average last season at 98.3 yards. His 2,614 yards through two seasons are the most in franchise history, ahead of NFL all-time rushing leader Emmitt Smith and another Hall of Famer, Tony Dorsett.

The Cowboys aren't making any secret about building their offense around him. Dallas dumped Dez Bryant, the franchise leader in touchdown receptions, in a cost-cutting move in the offseason. They believe the passing game with Prescott is best-suited feeding off Elliott.

That's why the Cowboys were as interested as Elliott was in a quiet offseason for the former Ohio State star.

"It's important for him, it's important for his teammates, it's important—obviously—for our franchise and what people's thoughts are on him," executive vice president of personnel Stephen Jones said. "I think it was huge that he was able to really get his hands around what this is all about—the challenges that are out there. Hopefully it'll continue."

With Bryant and 15-year tight end Jason Witten gone, Elliott mentions leadership every time he talks to reporters now. While acknowledging that vocal leadership doesn't come naturally for him, he's shown some signs in position drills at camp.

"I think he's grown into it pretty well," Brown said. "Obviously he's not a vocal leader. But I think he leads by example. When guys see him finishing the way he finishes and working the way he works, that speaks louder than his voice."

New Saints wide receivers vying for more snaps

Associated Press

METAIRIE, La. — When Saints rookie receiver Tre'Quan Smith picked his jersey number, he had a choice between 10 or 18.

The number 10 held no personal significance to Smith previously, but he knew it meant something to fans in New Orleans.

Brandin Cooks, the Saints' first-round choice in 2014, wore that number until he was traded to New England in 2017. So Smith, never shy about discussing his own high standards, went with that.

"It meant a lot, what he did on the field when he was here," Smith said of Cooks, who had two 1,000-yard seasons in New Orleans and is now with the Los Angeles Rams.

"It just boosts the expecta-

tions of like, what I have to do. Because I know the guy who wore it before me, he was a great player. So, I want to be a great player."

The 6-foot-2 Smith is one of two receivers who could grow into significant roles in New Orleans' passing game. The other is Cameron Meredith, a free-agent acquisition who led Chicago in receiving two seasons ago before missing all of last season with a knee injury.

Smith unabashedly endorses the notion that he was one of the steals of last spring's draft when he was selected in the third round — 91st overall — out of Central Florida.

Saints receivers coach Curtis Johnson said the 6-3 Meredith has the ability to give the Saints some of what they lost when the franchise's career receiving

leader, Marques Colston, retired after the 2015 season.

"When you talk about red zone and third down, one thing you want to do is you want to have length" on the field, said Johnson, who also was Meredith's position coach in Chicago two seasons ago. "He has the skills to separate in small spaces. For big guys, that's tough."

Johnson said Meredith can play out wide, but is particularly adept at executing "seam" routes down the middle of the field as a slot receiver, particularly against smaller defensive backs.

"There's a lot of small DBs in the league, and you love to see him match up with small guys, especially in the slot," Johnson said.

Last season, Michael Thomas and Ted Ginn were the

most productive members of New Orleans' receiving group; Thomas had 1,245 yards and five touchdown catches, while Ginn had 787 yards and four TDs receiving.

Both are back. But if Meredith returns to his form of 2016 — 888 yards, four TDs — and Smith develops quickly, quarterback Drew Brees could find it easier to punish defenses for shading coverage toward a particular side of the field, or a particular receiver.

Smith missed a number of offseason practices with a hamstring injury, but was able to take part in summer workouts Brees hosted in California.

Since camp opened, Smith periodically has been working with the first-team offense, and Brees has connected with him deep downfield already.

Nats' GM: Harper 'not going anywhere'

The Washington Post

As rumors popped up that superstar Bryce Harper might be headed here or there in a deadline day deal, Nationals general manager Mike Rizzo reached out to The Post with a simple message: "Bryce is not going anywhere. I believe in this team."

As of late Monday night, the Nationals had not ruled out dealing Bryce Harper before Tuesday's 4 p.m. nonwaiver trade deadline, according to people familiar with their plans. The organization has also fielded calls and gauged interest on high-priced relievers such as Kelvin Herrera and Shawn Kelley, while continuing to pursue Miami Marlins catcher J.T. Realmuto.

A complete sell-off does not seem to be in the works. Even a Harper trade would not necessarily have been a part of one, particularly if it netted the Nationals a piece to entice the Marlins to part with Realmuto. According to people familiar with the talks between those teams, the Nationals upgraded their offer for Realmuto this week and Miami rejected it anyway.

The Nationals were in touch with multiple teams on Harper. One team that spoke to them last night said they had multiple deals in the works for multiple players, including Harper. That team got the sense the Nationals got cold feet late last night, and that they would not consummate those deals. Rizzo always said they would have to be blown away, and apparently they were not.

Other people close to the team suggested the Nationals spoke to at least two teams about Harper on Monday, both of them in the American League. The Nationals would almost certainly want someone to relieve them of the remainder of Harper's \$21.63 million salary for 2018. People around the team have speculated they would ask an exorbitant return from any team that might have interest in the six-time all-star.

Early speculation suggested big-market teams such as the New York Yankees and Los Angeles Dodgers could have the most interest in the free agent-to-be. But the Houston Astros and Oakland Athletics could also fit as teams that need an outfielder and could pick up the rest of Harp-

er's salary.

By trading Harper now, the Nationals would have a) guaranteed a handpicked return for a player who could leave in free agency and yield only a draft pick if he does, b) freed up a place in the outfield for top prospect Victor Robles, giving the Nationals a dynamic outfield rotation of Robles, Juan Soto, Michael A. Taylor and Adam Eaton, and c) relieved that ever-present cloud of speculation about where Harper will go after this season and why he has been treated somewhat differently here over the years. Harper has always qualified as polarizing, and comments like the one he made Saturday night — when he said the Nationals would not have lost had Realmuto been on their side — alienate teammates who take silent notice.

No one seems sure what Harper might earn in free agency after struggling to hit above .215 this season while his strikeout rates jumped to their highest point since 2014. But most people believe he will ask for at least something near the \$325 million Giancarlo Stanton got from the Marlins.

MLB trade roundup

Astros deal Giles to Blue Jays for Osuna

Associated Press

Closers Roberto Osuna and Ken Giles switched spots. Adam Warren and Zach Duke moved into the Seattle bullpen. Lance Lynn got a new look in pinstripes. Adam Duvall will be slugging for the Braves. And Ian Kinsler is primed for a playoff run with his new team, the Red Sox.

A day before the deadline to make trades without waivers, there were plenty of deals Monday.

Hoping they could improve their bullpen without causing friction in the clubhouse, the defending World Series champion Houston Astros acquired Osuna from the Toronto Blue Jays for Ken Giles and two pitching prospects.

On Tuesday, the St. Louis Cardinals have traded outfielder Tommy Pham to the Tampa Bay Rays for three minor league players, outfielder Justin Williams, left-handed pitcher Genesis Cabrera and right-handed

pitcher Roel Ramirez.

The 23-year-old Osuna was a first-time All-Star last season, his second as the Blue Jays' full-time closer, and finished with 39 saves and a 3.38 ERA.

But he hasn't pitched in the majors since May 6 because he's been serving a 75-day suspension under Major League Baseball's domestic violence policy. That suspension ends Sunday. Osuna was charged in May with one count of assault in Toronto, a charge that remains pending.

The Astros have a zero tolerance policy on domestic violence and released former prospect Danry Vasquez in March after video leaked of him hitting his girlfriend. Houston pitchers Justin Verlander and Lance McCullers Jr. used social media to voice their disgust about Vasquez's actions after the video became public.

Astros general manager Jeff Luhnow said he reached out to several players and coaches before making the deal, and he

clarified that the team policy does not apply to conduct that occurred when a player wasn't in the Houston organization.

"Quite frankly, I believe you can have a zero tolerance policy and also have an opportunity to give people second chances when they have made mistakes in the past, in other organizations," Luhnow said. "That's kind of how we put those two things together."

Houston's closest competitors in the AL West, the Mariners, also added to their relief corps. They got Duke from the Minnesota Twins for a pair of minor leaguers and acquired Warren from the Yankees, also for two minor leaguers.

The 35-year-old Duke was 3-4 with a 3.62 ERA in 45 appearances for the Twins.

The 30-year-old Warren was 0-1 with a 2.70 ERA in 24 appearances for the Yankees in a season interrupted by a lengthy stay on the disabled list because of a strained back.

New York also made a move

to replace Warren, acquiring Lynn from the Twins for first baseman/outfielder Tyler Austin and right-handed prospect Luis Rijo.

The 31-year-old Lynn made 20 starts for the Twins, going 7-8 with a 5.10 ERA. The righty is likely to become a long reliever with the Yankees.

Late Monday, the Reds dealt Duvall to the Braves, who hope his bat will help them reach the playoffs for the first time in five years. The outfielder topped 30 homers in each of the past two seasons. He hasn't maintained that pace this year, with 15 homers in 105 games and a .205 batting average.

Cincinnati got right-handers Lucas Sims and Matt Wisler and outfielder Preston Tucker.

Badly needing outfield help, the Cleveland Indians acquired center fielder Leonys Martin from the Detroit Tigers on Tuesday.

Cleveland also got right-hander Kyle Dowdy for shortstop prospect Willi Castro.

Users didn't seek out players' tweets

Associated Press

A pair of Twitter users whose posts exposing offensive tweets by baseball players went viral over the weekend say their aim was not malicious but to give fans a fuller picture of who they're cheering for, and to expose the sport's "toxic" culture.

In exclusive interviews with The Associated Press, both users said they weren't looking for the years-old tweets from Milwaukee Brewers reliever Josh Hader or Atlanta Braves pitcher Sean Newcomb, but when the posts came across their timelines, they felt obligated to share them.

Kevin Jenkins wasn't looking through Hader's twitter feed as he watched the All-Star Game earlier this month. But then they began popping up on his Twitter feed. After seeing the pitcher's racist, sexist and ho-

mophobic remarks, it was hard for Jenkins to remain a fan.

"Before the tweets, I thought he was a cool guy," Jenkins said via direct message on Twitter. "An amazing pitcher and an even better person ... After the tweets, I mean ... It's hard to defend the guy. My opinion has definitely changed."

Jenkins compiled screenshots of a handful of Hader's offensive tweets and created a post. That tweet has garnered nearly 6,000 likes. He said his intent wasn't to dig up Hader's past to bring him down.

"I still feel that he's an amazing pitcher, but the things he said were inexcusable," Jenkins said. "None of us know if he's really changed since then. I felt it was important for people to see the tweets and make their own judgment."

After Hader's tweets came to light, the reliever was swift to apologize, saying the posts were

a youthful mistake, written in 2011 and 2012, when he was a 17-year-old and long before he was a major leaguer. For Jenkins, who is 16 and white, the explanation didn't fly.

"I'm younger than he was at the time, and no one would ever see anything like that from me," Jenkins said. "It's horrid."

Over the weekend, old, offensive tweets from Newcomb and Washington Nationals shortstop Trea Turner also resurfaced. Twitter user @NatsSquid posted about Newcomb after seeing one of the tweets on his timeline and did a search to see if there were others.

"Baseball culture is toxic and I want players to be held accountable for what they say," said @NatsSquid, who spoke to The AP via direct message on Twitter and declined to give a reporter his name identifying himself only as "a DC-area male."

"There is deeply rooted racism in baseball as well as homophobia and sexism," he said. "I would like baseball culture to change and be more accepting for everyone."

Despite the rivalry between the Nationals and Braves — currently fighting for position in the National League East — @NatsSquid said his posts were not a form of fan warfare.

"It absolutely had nothing to do (sic) with the Braves," he said. "When I tweeted out Newcomb's tweets, I didn't even remember that he played for the Braves. It wasn't about the game, or the team, it was about him as person. I was also really disappointed in the tweets that came out with Trea Turner and I thought I could expect better from him."

@NatsSquid said he was aware of the Hader controversy when he tweeted about Newcomb.

MLB roundup

Swihart's ground-rule double lifts Red Sox in 13

Associated Press

BOSTON — Blake Swihart has been waiting for his chance to make an impact as the third catcher on a Red Sox team that is putting together a historic season.

On Monday night, he waited all the way until the 13th inning.

After entering the game in the 10th as a pinch-hitter, Swihart bounced a double into the Red Sox bullpen to score Eduardo Nunez in the 13th and give Boston a 2-1 victory over the Philadelphia Phillies. After the game, the Red Sox announced they had acquired second baseman Ian Kinsler from the Los Angeles Angels to replace the injured Dustin Pedroia.

"Ian's a really good defensive player," said president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski, who also brought Kinsler to the Detroit Tigers when

he was general manager there. "Basically, it's what we hoped, early in the year, that Dustin would be."

With the win, the Red Sox improved to a major league-best 75-33 for the season and a season-high six games ahead of the New York Yankees in the AL East.

It was Swihart's first career walk-off RBI.

"He's stuck with it all year long," said Boston starter David Price, who allowed one run in eight innings but did not get a decision. "He hasn't gotten a lot of opportunities early on. His number's been called here recently, and he's stepped up to it. It's good when that happens, and I'm happy for him."

Hector Velazquez (7-0) pitched a scoreless inning for the win and Austin Davis (1-1) took the loss after pitching a perfect inning before allowing Nunez's leadoff single in

the 13th. Luis Garcia, the 12th pitcher of the night, struck out Brock Holt but allowed Nunez to steal second.

Mariners 2, Astros 0: James Paxton (9-4) excelled in his return from the disabled list, Nelson Cruz had a two-run double in the sixth inning and host Seattle beat Houston.

Brewers 5, Dodgers 2: Eric Thames hit a three-run home run and Christian Yelich extended his hitting streak to 14 games as visiting Milwaukee overcame a brief power outage delay and beat Los Angeles.

Twins 5, Indians 4: Mitch Garver drove in the winning run with a one-out double in the ninth inning, capping a victory over Cleveland after host Minnesota traded away reliever Zach Duke and starter Lance Lynn.

Braves 5, Marlins 3: Freddie Freeman hit a go-ahead homer in the third inning, Ron-

ald Acuna Jr. also went deep and host Atlanta beat Miami.

Cardinals 5, Rockies 4 (10): Marcell Ozuna hit his first career game-ending homer in the 10th inning, and host St. Louis snapped Colorado's four-game winning streak.

Athletics 10, Blue Jays 1: Edwin Jackson (2-2) pitched scoreless ball into the sixth for his 100th career victory and host Oakland rediscovered its offense to thump Toronto.

Rangers 9, Diamondbacks 5: Shin-Soo Choo homered twice and had four RBIs, helping visiting Texas rally after a power outage delay to beat Arizona.

Giants 5, Padres 3 (12): Gorkys Hernandez hit a go-ahead home run leading off the 12th inning and visiting San Francisco gave free-falling San Diego its sixth straight loss.