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Danville Register & Bee

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 JULY 7, 2019

Danville's gang warfare

A December 2015 drive-by shooting set off gang violence the likes of which Danville police had not seen before. In the two years that followed, there were 30 homicides; 15 were tied in some way to gangs.



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Danville police work the scene of a Dec. 5, 2015, shooting on Berryman Avenue. Court documents later showed it was a drive-by attack by a member of a gang named the Billys Bloods and started two years of a bloody gang battle.

By James Whitlow
 Register & Bee

The wave of gang violence that swept over Danville in 2016 and 2017 began with a single shooting.

It was a drive-by attack along Berryman Avenue by members of a gang named the Billys Bloods, federal and local court documents show.

Rival gangs believed the gunman to be Ekong Ben Eshiet — “one of the most dangerous people I’ve encountered,” a

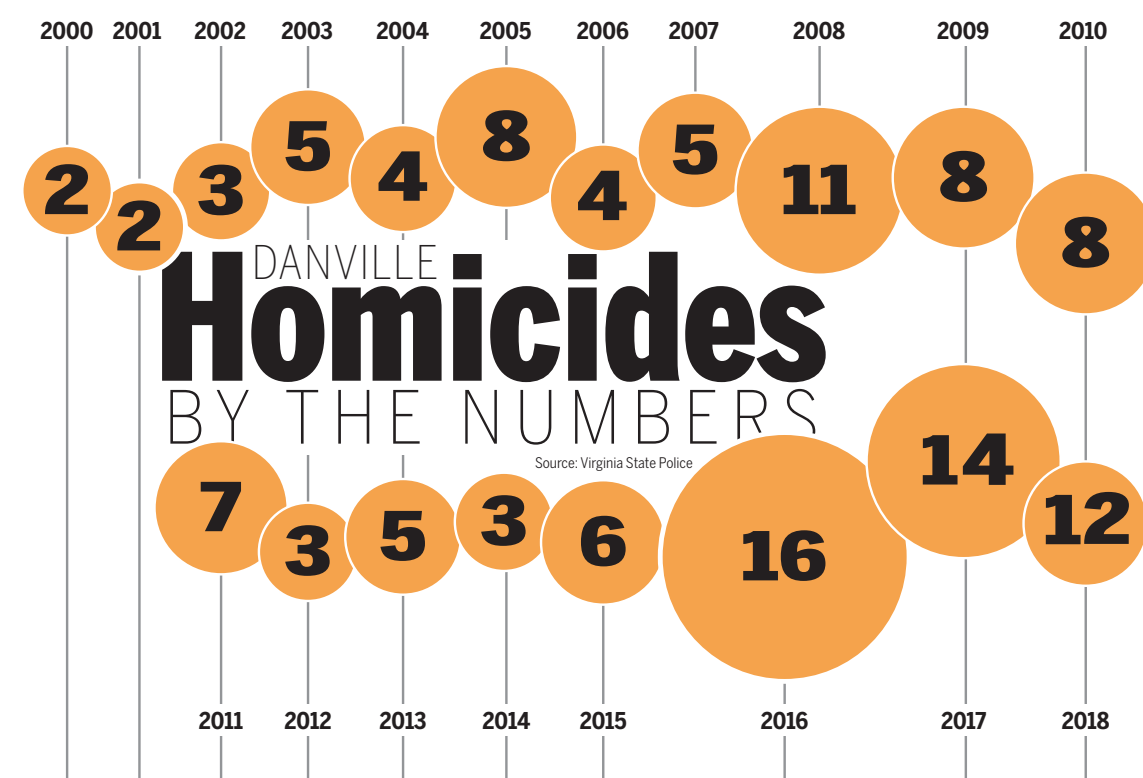
judge once remarked to him — and the shooting happened Dec. 5, 2015.

Later that month, members of the Rollin 60s

Crips gathered in a Lee Street trap house — a home used for dealing drugs or gang business — to discuss revenge. Four people picked up guns, pledging to get even.

“This incident and the retaliatory shootings that occurred afterwards appeared to spark and escalate a gang war between the Rollin 60s and Billys,” court documents state.

And the fight was on. The



AMANDA KENNY/REGISTER & BEE

shooting set off gang violence the likes of which Danville police had not seen before. While police had identified an incipient gang problem in the city as early as 2003, the department could not predict a gang war.

Officials agree the two years following the Eshiet shooting were bloody, but there is no one

reason to blame for the increase in homicides. In all, there were 30 homicides across 2016 and 2017; 15 were tied in some way to gangs.

Investigators point to national gang influence and police response being slower than needed. While the reasons for the violence are murky, what

is clear is gangs became more violent — focused on being the area's biggest and baddest, investigators said.

As for Eshiet, he eventually would land a dozen years in prison, but not for that shooting. No sooner had he finished serving

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ONLINE

For an interactive map that looks at the lives lost during the wave of violence that has swept through Danville, visit GoDanRiver.com.



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