

VIDEO OF SHOOTING WENT VIRAL

Defense: Dogs were 'in process of killing' cows

By **Anthony Colarossi** | STAFF WRITER

The video of a man shooting two Siberian huskies in an Orange County cow pasture went viral, gaining international attention, but that man's attorneys urged jurors hearing his criminal case Monday to look beyond what was recorded and consider the events leading up to the gunshots.

"That's just a snapshot of what happened that day," said defense attorney Thomas Sommerville, who represents Christopher Comins, the man charged with two felony counts of animal cruelty with a firearm in the May 19, 2008, incident.

Sommerville and fellow defense attorney Chandler Muller argued that the two huskies had escaped their owner, found cattle in the pasture and, as Sommerville put it Monday, were "in the process of

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GEORGE SKENE/ORLANDO SENTINEL FILE

Christopher Comins is charged with 2 felony counts of animal cruelty in the 2008 incident.

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killing these cattle." During that process, which they said spanned a few hours, the two dogs teamed up and took turns causing the animals stress and denying them access to water.

Sommerville said Comins "did what we believe is legal under the law," citing statutory language that states a legitimate defense for killing a dog is when that dog kills livestock.

But Assistant State Attorney Erin DeYoung said in her opening statement that "Christopher Comins shot those dogs over and over and over again. There's not a single injury to those cows."

She said Comins fired nine times.

"The dogs were hit at least seven times," DeYoung added, arguing that the dogs had collars on and that Comins continued to fire even as onlookers shouted for him to stop and even as the dogs' owner came running, also calling for him to stop firing.

Comins has said he was given permission to shoot the dogs by the property



COURTESY OF PATTY YANG

Video of a man shooting 2 Siberian huskies in a cow pasture gained worldwide attention.

owner and the livestock owner in order to protect a young calf.

The shooting in the pasture near Lake Nona on land owned by developer Daryl Carter made news worldwide after video of it was posted on YouTube. Carter asked Comins to kill the dogs after he learned cattle might be in jeopardy on his land off Narcoossee Road.

DeYoung is expected to show jurors the tourist-taken video that captured Comins shooting the dogs.

The dogs — Raley and Hoochie — survived the bullets. Raley was hit with four. Hoochie was struck with

three and lost an eye.

One of the witnesses that day, Raigan Alianell, testified Monday that she was passing by the pasture when she and her then-boyfriend noticed the dogs. Alianell said she immediately recognized that the huskies did not belong in the field with the cows.

She said it looked as if the dogs were "dancing" around the cows. When asked by Muller if she knew whether this was predatory behavior, Alianell said she did not know.

She said the shooting started soon after they stopped near the scene.

Asked by Muller if she saw either dog charge at Comins, Alianell said, "I saw him turn when he got shot in the shoulder, and then he got it in the face immediately after."

She described witnesses on the scene "screaming, 'Stop! Stop! Stop him!'"

When asked by DeYoung if she thought the dogs should have been shot, Alianell said, "Absolutely not."

The trial resumes at 9:30 a.m. today in front of Orange Circuit Judge Bob LeBlanc.

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