

Gunfire targets police chief

May was conducting investigation

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COLUMBUS — An unknown assailant fired two gun shots at Columbus Police Chief Clare May on Tuesday morning around 10:15 a.m. while he was checking the status of two abandoned vehicles parked at the Family Dollar Store, approximately one-half mile from the U.S.-Mexico border.

"The shots came whizzing by within a few feet," May said. "They seem to be coming from the east side of a cyclone-fenced storage enclosure on the American side of the border. There are several old buses, trailers and other vehicles parked within the enclosure, so I'm not sure if the shots were fired from someone in one of the vehicles or standing outside. They were definitely not coming from Palomas."

Law enforcement units from the Luna County Sheriff's Office, U.S. Border Patrol and New Mexico State Police all responded to the scene searching for the reported sniper while aerial surveillance was conducted by a U.S. Border Patrol helicopter.

"We're patrolling this with several units, covering the scene and attempting



U.S. Border Patrol units respond to site of sniper fire reported to have been directed at Village of Columbus Police Chief Clare May.

to locate any evidence," said Luna County Sheriff deputy Edward Apodaca. "Sheriff Gary Cicotelli and other officers are out there checking the storage enclosure and surrounding area."

As of 5:29 p.m. Tuesday, none of the law enforcement agencies investigating the alleged shots turned up any solid, physical evidence.

Family Dollar Store manager Maria Rutiaga said she has received numerous threats, including death threats, because she is being accused of reporting undocumented immigrants who are hiding in the store or abandoned and stolen vehicles parked in the store's parking lot. "They have been threatening me, threat-



SYLVIA BRENNER PHOT

Luna County Sheriff Deputy Edward Apodaca (center) takes information from Columbus Police Chief Clare May.

ening to shoot me and threatening to burn my Explorer," she said. "I don't feel safe anymore. These vehicles had been parked in the parking lot for three

days, so I called Officer May to have them removed. Now look at what happens. Someone tries to shoot him and all of this is putting me in a very dangerous position."

Rutiaga said her main concern was

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