

Rape suspect Salvador Orozco vows to clear name

By [Dan Warburton](#) – The Evening Chronicle

SEX attack suspect Salvador Orozco today vowed to clear his name and insisted: “I’m innocent.” The 48-year-old is being held in a Federal Detention Centre in Hawaii as legal teams mount a bid to extradite him to Tyneside over historic rape claims. It follows a 20-year manhunt by detectives investigating the brutal attack of a Gateshead barmaid as she made her way home from work in 1990.

But today – with Orozco’s fate yet to be decided – his attorney said the tattooed labourer was being held in a secure unit from where he insisted he was not guilty. Deputy Federal Defender Sean Coutain, based in the holiday island’s Honolulu region, said: “He maintains his innocence.”

Last week the Chronicle told how detectives from the Hawaii Fugitive Task Force stormed a security company after they were contacted by authorities in the UK.

Orozco was arrested by US Marshalls at the company where he earns \$12-an-hour on Puunene Avenue, in the isolated Kahului area of Hawaii.

Prosecutors claim he has spent 22 years in his idyllic retreat after making a trans-Atlantic trip to the west coast of America. But Mr. Coutain said his client, a US citizen, had never knowingly evaded police and revealed Orozco had stayed on Tyneside for eight years after the attack before leaving for the US.

He told the Chronicle: “He never ‘fled’ the UK. He lived there for eight years after this attack happened. He has never assumed a false identity or tried to hide.

“He absolutely maintains his innocence. He is a US citizen and he would not have stayed in the UK for eight years. He spent a long time in the UK before coming back to his home country.”

Orozco is wanted in connection with an attack that happened on May 17, 1990, when a 20-year-old barmaid was ambushed as she made her way home from work on Askew Road in Gateshead.

She was dragged into a deserted yard and subjected to a sex assault in which the attacker told her: “My name is Sushi. I’m Japanese.”

Orozco is due to face an extradition hearing at Hawaii’s US District Court in front of Judge Barry Kurren this week.

Mr Coutain said: “He’s in high spirits and he’s had some time to think about it and he has yet to decide if he will oppose extradition. I’ve advised him on his rights and the pros and cons and he must make a decision.”

In July last year British Embassy officials contacted the US Justice Department in an effort to locate, arrest and extradite him to the UK.

American police today said he was wanted in Newcastle for one count of rape, one count of indecent assault and one other sexual offence.

Michael Kawahara, the Assistant US Attorney based in Honolulu, Hawaii, said: "He's in a Federal Detention Centre in Hawaii." Photos leaked to the Chronicle last week showed the hulking labourer at his downstairs apartment of the two-storey building where he lived in the Pukalani area with his pet dog Nani.

It's believed the suspect, known to his friends as Sal, left his Felling home in Gateshead in the 1990s.

For more than a decade he lived in California before spending time at various Hawaiian beaches, building swimming pools for hotels.