

said.

May 27, 1949

## Cranston Flier's Jap Executioner Pays With Life

A Japanese lieutenant commander who beheaded a Cranston fighter pilot after the latter had been captured by the Japanese in 1944, was hanged today in Tokyo for his war crime, the Associated Press reported:

Lt. Robert Thorpe, 20, of 3 Doyleston Drive, Cranston, was beheaded on Kairiru Island, near New Guinea, by Kaoru Okuma, who paid for his crime today with his life.

Lieutenant Thorpe, a son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter R. Thorpe, had enlisted in the Air Corps Sept. 15, 1942. He was commissioned a second lieutenant on Aug. 30, 1943, and went overseas four months later.

He was reported missing in action over New Guinea on May 27, 1944, while piloting a Thunderbolt fighter plane.

July 6, 1948

## Jap to Hang for Killing Cranston Man

An Eighth Army commission today in Yokohama sentenced Lt. Comdr. Kaoru Okuma, former Japanese Navy officer, to be hanged for war atrocities against Lt. Robert E. Thorpe of 3 Doyleston Drive, Cranston.

Witnesses testified that Lieutenant Thorpe was used for pistol target practise and then beheaded by Okuma and other officers, the Associated Press said. Thorpe had parachuted from his disabled plane to Kairiru Island, near New Guinea, and was captured by the Japs in June, 1944.

Capt. Kiyishisa Noto, another defendant, was sentenced to 20 years at hard labor. His sentence was added to a similar one meted out by an Australian court for another atrocity.

Two Japanese lieutenants and an ensign were sentenced to life imprisonment in the case.

June 22, 1948



ROBERT E. THORPE

## Assassins of Local Flyer Now on Trial

According to word received from Yokohama, Japan, Yutaka Odazawa, former Japanese naval officer has pleaded guilty to the charge of beheading Second Lieut. Robert E. Thorpe of this city.

Thorpe, son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter R. Thorpe of Doyleston Drive, was an army flier and was shot down and captured by the Japanese in May, '44. For two years he was listed as missing, but in 1946 was declared presumably dead. Japanese in the New Guinea area who surrendered at the close of the war gave conflicting reports of the death of the young Cranston flier. So conflicting were the reports that an investigation was made and this revealed that five of the Jap naval officers were involved in the torture of the Cranston flier. These men are now on trial in a war crimes court. Odazawa pleaded guilty to the charge of beheading Thorpe and the other four pleaded innocent to a charge of using Thorpe as a target for pistol practice.

It is one of the most revolting crimes uncovered by the investigators. Thorpe enlisted a few months after graduating from high school. He participated in many engagements and was cited several times.

June 22, 1948

## 5 Japs on Trial For R.I. Man's Death.

Five former Japanese navy officers went on trial before a war crimes court at Yokohama today on charges of beheading Second Lieut. Robert E. Thorpe, son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter R. Thorpe of 3 Doyleston Drive, Edgewood, after using him for pistol target practice.

Yutaka Odazawa, charged with the actual beheading, pleaded guilty. The others, accused of shooting at Thorpe and ordering his execution and torture after his plane crashed and he was captured in New Guinea in May, 1944, pleaded innocent.

### Lieutenant Thorpe

Lieutenant Thorpe, pilot of a Thunderbolt fighter plane, was reported missing when he failed to return from a strafing mission against an air strip near Wewak, New Guinea, and his parents have been notified that no trace has been found of him or his plane and he is presumed to have been killed in action.

Lieutenant Thorpe's plane was last seen as it went into a dive against the air strip from 15,000 feet. The strip was close to the ocean and it is presumed that the plane fell into the sea.

A graduate of Cranston High School, Lieutenant Thorpe enlisted in the air forces in September, 1942, and was commissioned Aug. 30, 1943. He went overseas in December of that year and took part in 17 missions during his first month in action.

He was active as one of the younger yachtsmen in the upper bay before entering the army.

In addition to his parents, he leaves a sister, Nancy Thorpe, and a brother, Gill Thorpe, both of Edgewood.