

Arts and Science

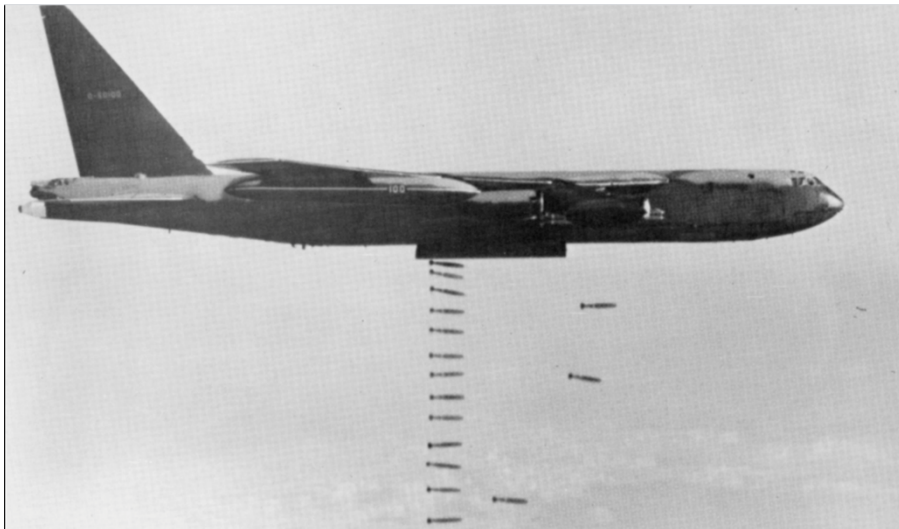
Joseph L. Ruzicka, Jr. of North Augusta was a man of both arts and sciences. A chemistry major in the Class of 1967, Ruzicka participated in Clemson's Honors Program, maintaining a high grade point average throughout his academic career. He was a four-year participant in Air Force ROTC and was selected for membership in Arnold Air Society. He was also a member of the Aero Club, serving as the organization's secretary. During his junior and senior years, Ruzicka served as vice president of Phi Eta Sigma, the national academic honor society. He was a member of the Canterbury Club, the campus organization for Episcopal students, and served as president of the Jaberwocky Coffee House.

Ruzicka was also a member of Tiger Band, which he served in a variety of roles including assistant librarian, supply officer, and band master. He also played in the Concert Band and served as the music chairman for Tigerama. Friends remembered his "boundless energy and enthusiasm" and his striving for excellence in everything he attempted.

Ruzicka was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Air Force at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama in 1967. Next, he attended Aerospace Munitions Officers School at Lowry Air Force Base near Denver. In April 1970, Ruzicka reported to Mather Air Force Base in California to train as a navigator and bombardier. While there, he met Calista Muck and they were married in March 1971. In February 1972, during a subsequent assignment at the Strategic Air Command's Beale Air Force Base in California, the Ruzickas welcomed a daughter, Jennifer. In



June, Ruzicka, now assigned to the 744th Bomb Squadron, was ordered to Guam and then to Thailand the following month.



The 744th was flying Arc Light missions in support of American combat operations in Vietnam. These missions, flown by B-52D bombers, were mounted in three-aircraft formations known as "cells."

Flying in the stratosphere, the big bombers were too high to be heard or seen from the ground. Their targets included enemy bases and supply routes as well as troop concentrations behind the lines.

On July 30, 1972, Captain Ruzicka was assigned as the navigator on an Arc Light mission originating from U-Tapao Royal Thai Air Base in Thailand.

The three-plane cell, designated “Snow,” was scheduled for take-off at 1857 hours, but Ruzicka’s aircraft, Snow 3, reported a hydraulics problem that required maintenance attention. As a result, the cell’s departure was delayed until 1905. The subsequent climb to 35,000 feet was without incident. Instrument flight conditions existed in cirrus clouds with an increasing number of thunderstorms in the vicinity. At one point, the cell, with Snow 3 flying eight miles behind the lead aircraft, turned to avoid thunderstorms. Moderate turbulence, moderate icing, and heavy St. Elmo’s fire were experienced by the cell. St. Elmo’s fire is a weather phenomenon in which a luminous discharge is created by a ship or aircraft during a storm. The discharge itself is not considered dangerous, but it indicates the presence of potentially deadly thunderstorms containing heavy precipitation, damaging hail, and violent updrafts and downdrafts.

At 2025, Snow 1 directed an increase in true airspeed to 470 knots. Three minutes later, Snow 3 transmitted, “Three’s in a dive, bail out, bail out, bail out!” Of the six crewmembers on board, only the gunner was able to cleanly exit the aircraft. He reported that “G” forces and the nose down attitude of the aircraft made it difficult to escape. The bomber crashed into the ground and exploded. A search and rescue mission arrived on the scene about two hours later. The gunner was picked up at 2325. The bodies of the remaining crew member were recovered the following morning.

Captain Ruzicka was survived by his wife and their five-month-old daughter, his mother, sister, and grandmother. A memorial service was held at Beale Air Force Base. Captain Ruzicka’s decorations include the Air Force Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, and Vietnam Service Medal. He is buried in the Mount Vernon Cemetery, Fair Oaks, California.

