Massachusetts Air Force Member dies after setting himself on fire in protest to war in Gaza

Aaron Bushnell, a 25-year-old Massachusetts native, tragically died in the hospital after setting himself on fire outside the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C., in protest against Israel's war in Gaza. Bushnell, who grew up and went to school in Massachusetts, was an active duty member of the U.S. Air Force based in San Antonio, Texas.

The incident occurred on Sunday, with Bushnell livestreaming his self-immolation on the social media platform Twitch. In the video, he expressed his refusal to be complicit in what he described as "genocide," and shouted "Free Palestine!" as he burned in front of the embassy.

Local authorities responded to reports of an individual experiencing a possible medical or mental health emergency. Bushnell was pronounced dead at 8:06 p.m. ET Sunday, having sustained critical injuries. The Israeli Embassy confirmed that none of its staff were injured in the incident.

Bushnell had been on active duty since May 2020, serving as a cyber defense operations specialist with the 531st Intelligence Support Squadron at Joint Base San Antonio. He was known for his volunteer work with the San Antonio Care Collective, where he supported the city's unhoused population by providing blankets, sweaters, and snacks.

In the days before his death, Bushnell created a will detailing his final wishes, including arrangements for his cat, which he designated to his neighbor. Lupe Barboza of the Care Collective, who saw the will, described Bushnell as

someone who was measured and knew what he was doing.

The incident is currently under investigation by local police, the Secret Service, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The U.S. Air Force has stated that it will provide more information after notifying Bushnell's next of kin.

Pentagon spokesperson Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder expressed condolences to Bushnell's family, calling the event a tragic event. Air Force Col. Celina Noyes, the 70th ISRW commander, also extended sympathies to Bushnell's family and friends.

The war in Gaza, which sparked Bushnell's protest, has resulted in significant casualties and displacement. According to the health ministry in Gaza, over 29,000 people have been killed, and nearly 2 million have been displaced, with over 60% of housing damaged.