

The San Diego Union-Tribune

Record-setting balloonist dies following accident near Warner Springs



Julian Richard Nott
(via Facebook)

Julian Richard Nott, 74, was injured Sunday in a bizarre accident near Warner Springs. The Santa Barbara resident established 79 world ballooning records over his life for feats of altitude, distance and time aloft.

By [ALEX RIGGINS](#) WRITER
MARCH 28, 2019

10:19 PM

WARNER SPRINGS —

A renowned British balloonist and scientist who set 79 world ballooning records in his lifetime died Tuesday at a hospital following a balloon-related accident over the weekend near Warner Springs.

Julian Richard Nott, 74, was injured Sunday in a bizarre accident several hours after his pressurized, high-altitude cabin and balloon landed north of Warner Springs and east of Palomar Mountain, according to an [obituary on his website](#) and information provided by the San Diego County Sheriff's Department.

Nott lived in Santa Barbara.

According to the obituary, Nott's partner of 30 years was by his side as he "passed away peacefully" Tuesday from injuries that resulted from "an extraordinary and unforeseeable accident following a successful balloon flight and landing in Warner Springs."

"Julian was flying an experimental balloon that he invented (and) designed to test high-altitude technology," the obituary said.

Nott landed the balloon safely around 12:45 p.m., but about three hours later, tragedy struck on the side of a mountain near Chihuahua Valley Road and state Route 79, in a remote area in the northernmost region of San Diego County.

"As he was packing up the cabin, it tumbled down the mountain with him inside," Roberta Greene, a spokeswoman for Nott's family, wrote in an email. "He sustained multiple head injuries (and other injuries.)"

Sheriff's Lt. Dustin Lopez said deputies were notified of the accident around 3:30 p.m.

According to the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale — also known as the FAI or the World Air Sports Federation — Nott set a new Guinness World Record in 2017, at age 72, for the [highest documented tandem skydiving jump](#), from 31,916 feet.

The FAI website also lists [dozens of Nott's other world records](#) — some of which have since been eclipsed, and some of which still stand — for feats of altitude, distance and time aloft.

Nott was [profiled in The New York Times](#) in 1986 during the planning of what he hoped would be the first nonstop balloon flight around the world. That attempt and several subsequent attempts failed, but were notable because of how deadly previous attempts by other veteran pilots had been.

In 2014, Nott helped [Alan Eustace break the record for the world's highest parachute jump](#), from an altitude of 135,890 feet. Nott was the ballooning consultant for the [world-record jump](#), which began nearly 7,800 feet higher than the [much-hyped jump by Felix Baumgartner](#) and Red Bull.

Lopez, the sheriff's lieutenant, said deputies on Sunday afternoon were twice sent to the landing site where Nott was fatally injured.

Around 12:45 p.m., the deputies were alerted to a possible aircraft crash, but upon arrival learned that Nott's experimental balloon and pressurized cabin had made a soft landing in the area, and nobody was injured, Lopez said.

Several individuals involved in the flight told deputies it was being used for some type of high-altitude weather research being conducted by the University of Florida, Lopez said. The balloon's owner told deputies that arrangements would be made for the craft's cabin to be removed from the area the following day.

Deputies were again sent to the site around 3:30 p.m., this time with word that two people had suffered injuries, Lopez said. Patrol deputies and a sheriff's helicopter responded to the scene.

Both men were airlifted away by a sheriff's helicopter crew, then taken by a second helicopter to Palomar Medical Center in Escondido, Lopez said.

Updates:

3/28/19, 9:02 AM: *This story was updated with a more detailed description of how Nott suffered the fatal injuries.*

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/public-safety/story/2019-03-27/record-setting-balloonist-dies-following-accident-near-warner-springs>

The San Diego Union-Tribune

Famed balloonist Julian Nott mourned by colleagues as one of the 'great innovators' of the sport

The Santa Barbara-based inventor died Tuesday at an Escondido hospital from injuries suffered after he landed an experimental balloon near Warner Springs on Sunday

By [PAM KRAGEN](#),
[ALEX RIGGINS](#)
MARCH 29, 2019

5 AM

Members of the national ballooning community reacted with shock and sadness Thursday on news of the death of famed British balloon innovator Julian Nott, 74, who was mortally injured in an unusual accident following the successful landing of his experimental gas balloon near Warner Springs on Sunday.

During the 50 years the Santa Barbara resident spent flying, building and experimenting with balloons, he set 79 World Ballooning records and 96 British records. He was most famous for setting the world high-altitude record of 55,000 feet in 1980 and was also sought out by leading scientific institutions like the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena to design concept balloons capable of exploring the moons of Venus and Saturn.

Troy Bradley, a Balloon Federation of America board member who holds 64 records himself, said Thursday he was deeply saddened at the loss of his dear friend of nearly 40 years.

"Julian was one of the only great innovators. He never stopped working on pushing the limits," Bradley said. "I think Julian and I were driven in a lot of the same ways. He was always

trying to improve something rather than just trying to impress somebody. He was always thinking outside the box to make balloons go higher, faster and farther.”

In recent weeks, Nott had been working in a hangar in Tustin on his patent-pending cryogenic helium experimental balloon with a pressured passenger cabin. The AN balloon used compressed helium in twin storage tanks instead of hot air, which allowed it to stay aloft longer and fly at a much higher altitude. Several individuals involved in Sunday’s flight told San Diego County sheriff’s deputies it was being used for weather research being conducted by the University of Florida.

Nott landed the balloon safely around 12:45 p.m. Sunday, but about three hours later, tragedy struck on the side of a mountain near Chihuahua Valley Road and state Route 79, in a remote area in the northernmost region of San Diego County, according to Sheriff’s Lt. Dustin Lopez.

“As he was packing up the cabin, it tumbled down the mountain with him inside,” Roberta Greene, a spokeswoman for Nott’s family, wrote in an email. “He sustained multiple head injuries (and other injuries.)”

Deputies were again sent to the site around 3:30 p.m., this time with word that two people had suffered injuries, Lopez said. Nott and another man were airlifted away by a sheriff’s helicopter crew, then taken by a second helicopter to Palomar Medical Center in Escondido, where he later died, Lopez said.

According to an obituary published on Nott’s website Wednesday, he passed away Tuesday with his partner of 30 years, Santa Barbara artist Anne Luther, by his side. She could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Brian Boland, founder of the Experimental Balloon and Airship Association in Post Mills, Vt., said news about Nott’s death hit the industry pretty hard on Thursday.

“In Great Britain, he was one of the original characters,” Boland said. “The records he set were pretty outrageous. He was a great mind in the ballooning industry.”

Nott was known as the founder of the modern ballooning movement, both as an adventurer and a designer of new technology. The balloon he piloted to 55,000 feet is now displayed in the Smithsonian National Air & Space Museum and his record, based on the size of the balloon he piloted — small by today’s standards for high-altitude attempts — has never been broken, Bradley said.

Boland said he was most fascinated with Nott’s 1975 experiment with fellow pilot Jim Woodman on the Nazca plains in Peru. Working with rudimentary materials, the two men constructed a working hot-air balloon based on symbols and artwork of manned flight they’d seen in ancient Inca designs.

Boland said Nott had a very reserved British exterior when you first met him, but he was warm and generous with his time and expertise. Eight years ago, Nott unexpectedly showed up at Boland’s annual experimental balloon show and volunteered his time helping an exhibitor take his hot-air burner apart and diagnose its problem.

“He sort of operated on all levels,” Boland said. “He was doing these really out-there scientific things but then he was still a really down-to-earth guy that people could converse and interact with.”

Katie Griggs, Western Region director for the Balloon Federation of America, said everyone in the industry looked up to Nott as one of its most creative minds. Everyone was also closely watching Nott's AN cryogenic balloon project.

"It will probably be one of the most incredible inventions in ballooning," she said.

Griggs met Nott in 2015 and she'd stayed in touch with him ever since via Facebook. She said he was respected for his knowledge but even more appreciated for his eagerness to share his knowledge and push balloon science forward.

"He was a wonderful, wonderful man and a total sweetheart," she said. "We're just terribly sorry. This is a tremendous loss for ballooning."

https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.sandiegouniontribune.com/communities/north-county/story/2019-03-28/famed-balloonist-julian-nott-mourned-by-colleagues-as-one-of-the-great-innovators-of-the-sport%3f_amp=true