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## SPECIAL REPORT *Balloon quest*

Kevin Uliassi's solo attempt to fly around the world

Thursday, March 3, 2000 | Updated 7:35 a.m..

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### Uliassi found safe after ending global balloon trip

**7:35 a.m., March 3:** Kevin Uliassi was found by authorities in Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, after ending his attempt to circle the earth in a balloon. Uliassi was unharmed.

### Balloonist abandons attempt to circle the globe

**6 a.m. March 3:** Kevin Uliassi landed his balloon at 4:36 this morning in the country formerly known as Burma, aborting his global balloon flight before proceeding across the Pacific Ocean.

Uliassi's team reports on its Web site that it has alerted authorities in what is now called Myanmar, in order to begin the search for Uliassi and his J. Renee balloon.

Uliassi faced the decision early this morning whether to attempt a crossing of the Pacific. Spokesman Scott Lorenz said last night that factors including the amount of fuel and helium left, the forecast weather and wind patterns and the amount of oxygen, food and battery power remaining would be considered.

No word yet on what the final deciding



For more flight progress information, visit <http://www.j.renee.iit.edu/>.

#### Profile: Kevin Uliassi

**Age:** 36

**Residence:** Scottsdale, Ariz.

**Occupation:** Architect and mechanical engineer in Chicago.

**Education:** Studied physics and earned a degree in architecture from Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago.

**Background:** Born and raised in Chicago Heights. Began flying hot-air balloons in 1981.

**Family:** Wife, Renee. A native of Elgin who works as the buyer for a hospital in Scottsdale. Uliassi named his balloon after her.

factor was. Uliassi took off Feb. 22 from a quarry in Loves Park.

## **Uliassi, J. Renee team approach decision about crossing the Pacific**

HOMEWOOD -- Kevin Uliassi is asleep high over India, but the balloonist will face a tough decision sometime Friday, whether or not to attempt crossing the Pacific Ocean.

Uliassi was flying at an altitude of more than 31,000 feet at speeds higher than 100 mph. But spokesman Scott Lorenz said factors including the amount of fuel and helium left, the forecast weather and wind patterns and the amount of oxygen, food and battery power remaining will be considered before Uliassi attempts to cross the Pacific Ocean.

"You have to make the call over dry land," he said. "We're very optimistic, but we'll know tomorrow. Keep your fingers crossed."

Uliassi has traveled more than 12,650 miles in his quest to become the first person to circle the earth alone in a balloon. He has been in the air for 10 days since lifting off from a Loves Park quarry Feb. 22.

-- *Jason Freund*

## **Uliassi nears half-way point in trip around world**

HOMEWOOD -- Kevin Uliassi should reach the half-way point some time tonight in his quest to become the first man to circle the earth alone in a balloon.

As of 5 p.m. Thursday, Uliassi was cruising at more than 100 mph, 1,000 feet above India. He is expected to reach the midpoint of the trip somewhere Bangladesh.

After surviving a storm over Egypt Wednesday night, Uliassi was able to get a full night's sleep while traveling toward Iran.

Since lifting off from a Loves Park quarry Feb. 22, Uliassi has traveled more than 1,250 miles.

Uliassi has been flying the balloon -- called the J. Renee after his wife -- for 10 days.

-- *Jason Freund*

## **Uliassi rested, expected to reach Burma by nightfall**

**1:30 p.m., March 2:** Kevin Uliassi is flying at 27,000 feet over India as of this afternoon.

Uliassi, who attempting to be the first person to fly solo around the world in a hot air balloon, is traveling at 110 mph.

"He's really covering some tracks," said Flight Spokesman Scott Lorenz. The temperature over India is nine degrees below zero.

Uliassi, who has been flying in his balloon -- The J. Renee -- for 10 days now, got eight hours of sleep before reaching Iran and about three more hours while crossing Iran.

"So he got a lot of sleep. He is well rested," Lorenz said.

Lorenz expects Uliassi to reach the border of Burma this evening.

He has traveled a total of 11,650 miles since taking off from a rock quarry in Loves Park Feb. 22.

## **Uliassi weathers storm, hits**

## **fastest speeds of global trip**

**6 a.m., March 2:** Kevin Uliassi and the J. Renee traveled at speeds of up to 120 mph Wednesday night, the fastest recorded since Uliassi took flight last week.

He crossed the Nile River in Egypt at 29,000 feet passing through an unexpected hail, sleet and snow storm that lasted for one hour. Uliassi, who is attempting to be the first person to fly solo around the world in a balloon, said the experience was like being inside a drum.

At one point, winds pushed the balloon to a 30 degree angle in relation to the gondola. Throughout the storm, the balloon ascended and descended at a rate of 1,500 feet per minute.

According to Flight Spokesman Scott Lorenz, Uliassi spoke with a TWA pilot during the storm. The pilot told Uliassi that this type of weather was common over the region.

Due to the high number of visitors to the J. Renee website, the site will receive an upgrade today. Updates on Uliassi's flight progress will be significantly delayed, Lorenz said.

- *Corina Curry*

## **Solo flight speeds as fuel drops**

**10:30 p.m., March 1:** At 9 p.m., Uliassi's craft still was traveling 116 mph and was situated somewhere over Saudi Arabia. Ground crew spokesman Scott Lorenz said Uliassi, who took off Feb. 22 from a quarry in Loves Park, could travel up to 3,000 miles a day if he stays in the rapid, high-altitude current.

At a pace that at times fell below 30 mph, it took Uliassi seven days to cover the first 7,000 miles of the more than 20,000 miles estimated for a successful journey.

With Kevin Uliassi finally having caught hold of the jet stream that eluded him during the first eight days of his attempt to fly solo around the world in a balloon, his success now likely hinges on whether he has enough fuel to complete the mission.

That was the opinion Wednesday of Steve Fossett, the millionaire Chicago stock trader who holds the world record for the longest balloon flight by a lone pilot.

## **Balloonist finishes one-third of journey around the world**

**6 p.m., March 1:** As of 5 p.m., Kevin Uliassi was cruising at a speed of 160 mph, having built speed throughout the day after entering the jet stream at 6 a.m. and passing over Egypt and the Red Sea to reach Saudi Arabia.

Uliassi has now traveled 10,000 miles since taking off Feb. 22 from a quarry in Loves Park, spokesman Scott Lorenz said.

The 36-year-old architect and engineer is a third of the way from making a complete circle of the globe, Lorenz. If successful, Uliassi would become the first person to fly solo around the world in a balloon.

## **Uliassi flies over Red Sea, heads toward Saudi Arabia**

**2 p.m., March 1:** As of 2 p.m. Wednesday, Kevin Uliassi had finally caught hold of the jet stream that eluded him for the first eight days of his solo attempt to fly around the world in a balloon.

The J. Renee, named after Uliassi's wife, began moving into the rapid, upper air current at 6 a.m., spokesman Scott Lorenz said. By 9 a.m., Uliassi had doubled his speed to 120 mph and was approaching the Red Sea at noon.

At his current pace, Uliassi could cross the sea within two hours, Lorenz said. From there, he likely would travel over Saudi Arabia and Iran en route to China.

During the night, Uliassi had to fix an electrical problem that caused several instruments to go "haywire," Lorenz said. Corrosion on a ground wire was the source of the malfunction.

## **Balloonist picks up speed, gets nod to fly over Iran**

**6 a.m., March 1:** Kevin Uliassi is flying over Lybia at a speed of 80 mph, the fastest he has yet to travel on his attempt to be the first person to fly solo around the world in a balloon.

Uliassi received permission Tuesday to fly over Iran, an obstacle for the Flight of the J. Renee since the balloon launched from a Loves Park rock quarry last week. Uliassi thanked authorities for granting the permission in the spirit of cooperation and sportsmanship.

Uliassi has been in the air for eight days and going strong, according to flight spokesman Scott Lorenz. It is 28 degrees below zero outside Uliassi's insulated flight capsule. Inside, it is 65 degrees and Uliassi has yet to turn on his on-board heater.

By Wednesday morning Uliassi should reach the middle of Lybia at an altitude of 29,300 feet, Lorenz said.

## **Uliassi enters Libyan air space**

**10:30 p.m., Feb. 29:** At 9 p.m., Uliassi was traveling about 80 mph over Libya, a country that until now, repeatedly denied air space to foreign balloonists. Iran also granted overflight permission to Uliassi.

"The Libyans have been very gracious," said Uliassi spokesman Bow Kemper, Tuesday night.

"They and other countries," he said, "realize it's a flight of goodwill, sportsmanship and cultural exchange."

Meanwhile, people around the world are keeping track of Uliassi's whereabouts evident by the millions who have tapped into the [www.j.renee.iit.edu](http://www.j.renee.iit.edu) Web site. "People are watching history develop before their eyes," Kemper said.

## **Uliassi cleared to fly over Libya**

**6 p.m., Feb. 29:** HOMEWOOD -- Balloonist Kevin Uliassi is flying high over Algeria and near the Sahara Desert, sailing toward Libya, a country that has been a "stumbling block" for other balloon attempts.

During a press conference about 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, Uliassi said he had received permission to cross over Libya.

"They offered me a visa if I want to land there," he said.

Uliassi was cruising at about 29,300 feet, traveling at about 61 mph. Since lifting off from a Loves Park quarry Feb. 22, he has traveled more than 7,425 miles in his solo trip around the world.

Talking to reporters on a satellite phone, Uliassi commented on the amount of stars he could see and the beauty of his trip.

He mentioned talking to a nearby airplane earlier in the day and the amazement of the pilot and passengers to learn how far Uliassi had been flying.

"It's very interesting, the effect this has on people," he said. "That someone just like them can get in a balloon and try to fly around the world."

- *By Jason Freund*

## **Faulty alarm keeps Uliassi awake most of the night**

**2:30 p.m. Feb. 29:** Balloonist Kevin Uliassi was alternating between sleep and work Tuesday afternoon after staying up all night to handle a malfunction.

A faulty alarm incorrectly told Uliassi that his pilot light had gone out and shut down the system used to heat the helium in the balloon. Uliassi must heat the helium at night to keep from losing altitude.

"It frosted over or got dirt in it and

thought there was no pilot light going," Spokesman Scott Lorenz said. "It sounded an alarm and shut the fuel off."

Uliassi bypassed the alarm manually and remained awake through the night to be certain the balloon was not descending.

"Kevin's a mechanical engineer and an architect, so none of this even phases him," Lorenz said.

Uliassi continues to make his way across Africa in his quest to become the first person to circle the earth alone in a balloon.

At about 1:30 p.m., Uliassi was flying about 30,100 feet over Algeria, making his way to Niger and then on to Libya. Since lifting off Feb. 22, Uliassi has traveled more than 7,217 miles.

## **Balloonist grabs a nap as he sails over Faso in Africa**

**6 a.m. Feb. 29:** Kevin Uliassi is taking a short nap as his balloon continues to make its way across Africa. About 5:15 a.m. Tuesday, the J. Renee -- named after his wife -- was preparing to leave Mali and pass over Faso.

Since leaving a Loves Park quarry Feb. 22, Uliassi has traveled more than 6,700 miles in his quest to become the first person to circle the earth alone in a balloon.. Flight engineer Pete Fay said Uliassi currently is cruising about 30,000 feet in the air at a speed of about 60 mph, but those in the Homewood command center expect his speeds to increase.

"In the next day or so, we hope he goes up to 100 knots, or 120 mph," Fay said. "We've got ourselves right where we want to be."

Fay also said the command center is busy conversing with air traffic controllers now that Uliassi is traveling over land. Early Tuesday morning, Uliassi took special note of his location as well. "In case you haven't already noticed, the balloon has now made it to Timbuktu" Uliassi wrote as he passed just south of the city, located in Mali. -- By: Jason Freund

## **J. Renee, Uliassi sail over Mali**

**10 p.m., Feb. 29:** As of 9:30 p.m. Monday, balloonist Kevin Uliassi was sailing over Mali in Africa at a speed of 62 mph.

He has traveled 6,300 miles since departing from the Loves Park stone quarry early on Feb. 22. Bow Kemper, a member of Uliassi's ground support team in Homewood, said they are continuing to get updates from Uliassi every 30 minutes.

Temperature outside the J. Renee balloon's insulated capsule is minus 20 degrees, but Uliassi has maintained a cabin temperature of about 64 degrees while flying at an altitude of 29,500 feet.

-- *Chris Green*

## **Uliassi speeds his way across west Africa**

**6 p.m., Feb. 28:** Balloonist Kevin Uliassi picked up speed and altitude as he cruised over the capital of Nouakchott in the country of Mauritania in west Africa Monday afternoon.

Spokesman Scott Lorenz, a member of Uliassi's ground support team in Homewood, said the balloon was at 30,000 feet and traveling 62 mph Monday as of 4:30 p.m. Monday. Uliassi has traveled about

6,000 miles since his launch Tuesday for a solo balloon flight around the world.

Uliassi got a little more television exposure on Monday morning as he was interviewed by "Early Show" host Bryant Gumbel. Uliassi told Gumbel that he heard a guitar playing Thursday as he flew over Puerto Rico. Uliassi spent the weekend crossing the Atlantic Ocean.

- *Chris Green*

## **Uliassi finally reaches Africa**

**2 p.m., Feb. 28:** HOMEWOOD -- Solo hot air balloonist Kevin Uliassi reached the coast of Africa at 11:25 a.m. today, about half a day ahead of schedule.

Uliassi, who is attempting to be the first solo balloonist to fly around the world, e-mailed congratulations to his entire Homewood-based crew as he reached the coast traveling 62 mph at an altitude of 29,800 feet.

Since taking off from Loves Park early Tuesday morning, Uliassi has flown 5,870 miles. He has been in the air for six days and 14 hours.

He traveled over Nouakchott, Mauritania, at 29,700 feet at 11:30 a.m.

- *Corina Curry*

## **Balloonist's team prepares for flight over Africa**

**10 a.m., Feb. 28:** HOMEWOOD -- Balloonist Kevin Uliassi is expected to cross over dry land for the first time in several days when he reaches the coast of Africa about noon today.

At 9:30 a.m., Uliassi was traveling just under 30,000 feet over the Atlantic Ocean at a speed of about 60 mph and was less than 200 miles from the coast of Mauritania.

"That's the big news right now is about noon he will reach dry land," said spokesman Scott Lorenz. "But that's not right -- he will be flying over dry land."

Lorenz said the command center in Homewood is busy contacting foreign countries along Uliassi's flight path to ensure safe travel.

"We just got reconfirmation for Mauritania," he said. "We already had it, but we like to double check everything and stay a few countries ahead."

Overnight, Uliassi phoned his mother and wife to let them know about his continued progress and also wrote down some more of his thoughts, including that a jar of pickles did not "pop" when opened at high altitudes.

Uliassi has been airborne since launching from a Loves Park quarry early Tuesday morning. The entire trip is expected to take another 14-20 days.

- *Jason Freund*

## **Uliassi on course to reach Africa by noon today**

**6 a.m., Feb. 28:** HOMEWOOD – Balloonist Kevin Uliassi is closing in on the coast of Africa, still chasing his dream of being the first man to circle the earth alone in a balloon.

About 5:30 a.m., Uliassi was flying about 360 miles from land, cruising at a speed of about 47 mph, at an altitude of more than 29,000 feet. He is expected to reach land between 10 a.m. and noon Monday.

"We said about seven days to reach Africa and right now we're looking really smart," said Flight Engineer Pete Fay. "We're headed in the right direction."

Fay said the Homewood command center had already received a "morning list of things to do," including locating a phone number for Charlie O'Reilly, the man who taught Uliassi to fly balloons.

Fay joked that the mission had experienced its first equipment failure: the computer beeper that alerts Uliassi to incoming electronic messages. Uliassi seems to have disabled it because of the large amount of messages he receives from the command center.

"We've really had no equipment issues at all," he said.

Uliassi has traveled more than 5,300 miles since launching early Tuesday morning from a Loves Park quarry. If he is successful, he will have traveled more than 20,000 miles.

- *Jason Freund*

### **Uliassi maneuvers for higher altitude to gain speed**

*Rockford Register Star*

**10 p.m. Feb. 27:** HOMEWOOD -- Balloonist Kevin Uliassi and his ground support crew are busy making preparations to catch high winds when he reaches land sometime Monday morning.

Traveling at more than 28,000 feet late Sunday night, Uliassi was cruising at about 43 mph as he flew within 680 miles of the coast of Africa.

Spokesman Scott Lorenz said Uliassi was alternating between sleep and work as he moved the balloon up from an earlier cruising altitude of about 26,000 feet. He is expected to be traveling as high as 30,000 feet in the hopes of catching winds that could speed the J. Renee -- named after his wife -- up to 90 knots, or more than 100 mph.

"The higher he goes the better he is," Lorenz said. "He's just going to rock."

But Lorenz added that catching the high winds at the correct time is essential, or the balloon could be blown back out over the Atlantic Ocean.

"It's a little tricky but once he gets it, he should be fine," Lorenz said.

Uliassi has traveled more than 5,000 miles since launching from a Loves Park quarry early Tuesday morning. If he is

successful, Uliassi will be the first person to circle the earth alone in a balloon and will have traveled more than 20,000 miles.

- *Jason Freund*

## **Uliassi in smooth air on Day 6 of solo balloon trip**

*Rockford Register Star*

**6 p.m. Feb. 27:** HOMEWOOD -- After a full day of maneuvering and cruising toward the African coast, balloonist Kevin Uliassi is preparing to rest for the evening.

The J. Renee, named after his wife, is still airborne about 700 miles from dry land, cruising about 26,750 feet above the Atlantic Ocean at about 33 mph. If conditions remain favorable, Uliassi is expected to reach the coast sometime Monday morning.

Spokeswoman Marlene Gaidzik said the weather projections are clear and Uliassi should again get a full night's sleep in the balloon. "He just had some dinner and the balloon is flying in smooth air," said Gaidzik, who was just arriving for the overnight shift monitoring Uliassi's progress from the command center in Homewood. Since launching from a Loves Park quarry early Tuesday, Uliassi has traveled more than 4,750 miles. If he successfully circles the earth, Uliassi and the balloon will have traveled more than 20,000 miles.

- *Jason Freund*

## **Uliassi's craft slows as winds die down near Africa**

*Rockford Register Star*

**2 p.m. Feb. 27:** HOMEWOOD -- Kevin Uliassi continues to make his way toward the coast of Africa, where he hopes the jet stream will push him closer toward becoming the first man to circle the globe alone in a balloon.

At 1:30 p.m. Sunday, Uliassi was traveling at 26,800 feet above the Atlantic Ocean, about 750 miles west of Africa. Spokesman Scott Lorenz said Uliassi's

craft had slowed to about 38 mph, in part due to a lack of wind. "This is the part of the trip where there is no wind going 90 degrees due east," Lorenz said.

Uliassi had to intermittently raise and lower his balloon to various altitudes to catch winds that could push him further eastward. Once he reaches the jet stream, his balloon's speed could increase to about 90 knots -- more than 100 miles per hour.

- *Jason Freund*

## **Uliassi has peaceful night, approaches African coast**

*Rockford Register Star*

**Noon, Feb. 27:** HOMEWOOD -- Kevin Uliassi, solo pilot of the Flight of the J. Renee, experienced a peaceful night under the stars Saturday.

Absent the thunderstorms that plagued his travels Friday, Uliassi got eight hours of sleep, listened to Berloiz's Symphony Fantastique and watched the stars as he floated closer and closer to the west coast of Africa during Saturday's overnight hours, said flight engineer Pete Fay.

Uliassi is in good spirits and even had time to joke around with friends back at the flight's communications center in the Chicago south suburb of Homewood.

"Why do my fire extinguisher instructions say 'Do not discharge directly into face?'" he wrote in a text message to his land-based crew. Why would anyone do that unless their face was on fire, and if so, then what would you do, Uliassi joked.

The crew expects Uliassi to reach the coast of Africa sometime early Monday, Fay said.

"The only problem he's had so far is he was getting too hot in his capsule and had to turn on a fan to cool off," he said.

The temperature outside the J. Renee flight capsule is 12 degrees below zero. Fay said the temperatures inside have ranged from 69 to 71 degrees.

Uliassi is traveling at an altitude of 27,000 feet going about 45 mph. He is 830 miles away from the Africa coast.

He has traveled continuously for 5 days and 15 hours. He has traveled 4,524 miles.

- *Corina Curry*

## **Uliassi 1,150 miles from Africa, descends to stay on course**

**10 p.m. Feb. 26:** HOMEWOOD -- Hot air balloonist Kevin Uliassi is 1,150 miles from the west coast of Africa as of 9:30 p.m. Saturday.

Spokesman Scott Lorenz said Uliassi is near the Tropic of Cancer at about 19,000 feet, traveling 37 mph.

"He's good. He dropped to 19,000 feet to stay on course. It's part of steering maneuvers," Lorenz said. "He loses some speed when he drops but he needs to do. He has to catch different winds and go a little northeast and a little southeast in order to go east."

Uliassi was at 25,500 feet traveling 41 mph at 9 p.m.

The solo pilot has flown more than 4,400 miles during the past 4 days and 19 hours.

"He's in great spirits," Lorenz said. "He hasn't had to turn on his heater. The design of the capsule Kevin made is excellent, just excellent."

The temperature outside Uliassi's flight capsule is 11 degrees below zero. The temperature inside is 63 degrees.

The flight capsule of the J. Renee, Uliassi's balloon named after his wife, uses heat from the onboard machinery and equipment and Uliassi's own body heat to keep the inside of the capsule warm.

"It's looking very good at this point," Lorenz said.

- *Corina Curry*

## **Uliassi 1,500 miles from Africa**

*Rockford Register Star*

**6 p.m., Feb. 26:** HOMEWOOD -- Hot air balloonist Kevin Uliassi is traveling at 35 miles per hour at 20,500 feet over the middle of the Atlantic Ocean after a night of fighting three potential thunderstorms.

Despite a brief moment of alarm while passing over the third storm, Uliassi, who is 3,575 miles into an attempt to be the first person to fly solo around the world in a hot air balloon, described his trip so far as breathtaking and beautiful.

Uliassi, who departed on his round-the-world challenge from Loves Park at 12:50 a.m. Tuesday, has been flying for 109 hours. The Flight of the J. Renee, named after Uliassi's wife, is 1,500 miles from the coast of Africa at this time.

The 36-year-old architect and mechanical engineer slept for eight hours Friday night.

The temperature outside the balloon is 5 degrees. Inside Uliassi's flight capsule, it's 65 degrees.

- *Corina Curry*

## **Comfortable in 65-degree capsule, Uliassi heads for African coast**

**4 p.m., Feb. 26.:** HOMEWOOD -- At about 3 p.m. Saturday, hot air balloonist Kevin Uliassi was traveling at 35 miles per hour at 20,500 feet over the middle of the Atlantic Ocean after a night of fighting three potential thunderstorms.

Despite a brief moment of alarm while passing over the third storm, Uliassi described his trip so far as breathtaking. He is 3,575 miles into his attempt to be the first person to fly solo around the world.

Uliassi departed on his around-the-world challenge at 12:58 a.m. Tuesday. He is more than 100 hours into the trip and 1,500 miles from the coast of Africa, where he is expected to reach Monday.

The 36-year-old slept for eight hours Friday night. Inside his capsule is 65 degrees, and outside the balloon is 5 degrees.

- *Geri Nikolai*

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