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# Storm Dodging

## Balloonist Contends With Caribbean Storms

*The Associated Press*

**CHICAGO, Feb. 25** — U.S. balloonist Kevin Uliassi crossed north of the Virgin Islands today and was reported picking up speed for a trans-Atlantic crossing in his bid to make the first solo nonstop balloon flight around the Earth.

His command center said he had a busy night dodging Caribbean thunderstorms but was taking the helium and propane-fired hot air balloon up to an anticipated cruising altitude of 28,000 feet. His speed was 48 miles per hour but that was expected to increase during the day.

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Kevin Uliassi lifted off in his 160-foot balloon from a stone quarry near Rockford, Ill., early Tuesday. He hopes to complete the journey in 14 to 20 days. (ABCNEWS.com/ Magellan Geographix)

"It's off to Africa at a very nice clip," said spokesman Scott Lorenz from the 36-year-old adventurer's base near Chicago.

Uliassi, an architect and balloon flight instructor with homes in Chicago and Scottsdale, Ariz., began his flight at a stone quarry in Northern Illinois early Tuesday.

If he completes the circle his 20,000-mile journey could take from 10 to 20 days to complete, though it appeared the slow start of the past few days could add to that.

A two-man team made the first successful nonstop balloon circumnavigation last year, but the solo record is unclaimed.

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