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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.



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.

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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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