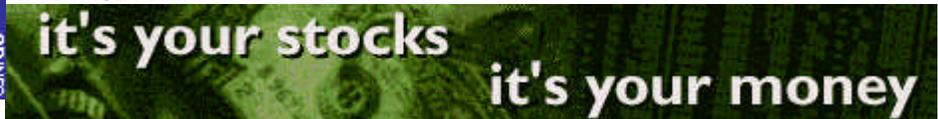




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Headline News brief

# U.S. solo balloonist safe after round-the-world failure

## Kevin Uliassi lands in Myanmar

March 3, 2000  
Web posted at: 11:06 p.m. HKT (1506 GMT)



In this story:

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**PAGAN, Myanmar** (CNN) -- [Kevin Uliassi's](#) attempt to become the first solo balloonist to circle the globe ended in failure halfway from his goal Friday when the U.S. adventurer touched down in the Asian nation of Myanmar (formerly known as Burma).

Flight spokesman Bo Kemper said the Myanmar government told him Uliassi's balloon, the J. Renee, touched down at about 5:30 a.m. EST (1030 GMT) in an open field near some railroad tracks and a road.

A message posted on the flight's Web site said Uliassi, 36, "is safe and in good condition."

"It was a controlled descent," Kemper said. "It was a nice, normal landing."

**The goal:**  
To count as a round-the-world flight, a balloon must cross all lines of longitude and must cover at least half the length of the

Myanmar authorities confirmed that Uliassi landed in the small village of Sinthamwe in central Myanmar, about 12 miles (20 kilometers) east of Pagan, an area of ancient temples about 300 miles north of the capital, Yangon, which was formerly known as

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at least half the length of the equator, according to the Federation Aeronautique Internationale, the governing body of air sports.

The distance around the globe at the equator is 24,902 miles.

Rangoon.

Uliassi last communicated with his flight crew 13 hours before he landed, when he told them he was going to sleep, Kemper said.

Kemper said he does not know why Uliassi decided to come down. He also didn't know what happened to his communication system.

When Uliassi went down, his flight command center in Homewood, Illinois, near Chicago, initiated a search and rescue mission with the Myanmar government, with the help of the U.S. government.

Kemper said Uliassi is currently with local authorities.

## Zigzagging over the Atlantic

Uliassi (pronounced oo-lee-AH-see) traveled more than 13,225 miles after launching from a rock quarry near [Rockford, Illinois](#), on February 22.

His [zigzagging route](#), however, resulted in a dilemma this week.

Because crossing the Atlantic took longer than anticipated -- he had to change altitude several times to avoid thunderstorms -- Uliassi was unsure whether he had enough fuel and supplies to make it across the Pacific.

"In any long distance balloon flight there are several points where or a 'go' or 'no-go' decision has to be made," Lorenz said late Thursday. "It's water, water everywhere and it's several days without any land in sight."

## Second failure

The flight was the second such attempt for Uliassi, a 36-year-old engineer who lives in [Scottsdale, Arizona](#), but lifted off from the Chicago area to be close to his family and ballooning friends.

In December 1997, the bottom of his balloon ruptured over O'Hare International Airport, forcing him down in Indiana.

He sat out the last two years out because of bad health and bad weather. Unlike his wealthier rivals, such as Chicago millionaire [Steve Fossett](#), Uliassi has no flush bank accounts to draw from.

He relied on sponsors and donations to raise the \$500,000 he needed, and 15 volunteers were staffing his flight command center.

Closely watching Uliassi's progress was Fossett, who holds the world solo balloon flight record -- 14,235 miles -- set in 1998. That trip ended when a storm off the Australian coast sent his balloon into the Pacific.



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Jones, left, and Piccard are the first men to circle the globe in a balloon

Fossett, speaking before the flight ended Friday, said Uliassi could be proud of his attempt.

"I would think in Kevin's case that he has to be very pleased," Fossett said. "He's making one of the finest balloon flights ever, and he had not previously made a long balloon flight. It's outstanding so far."

Last March, Swiss psychiatrist Bertrand Piccard and English balloon instructor Brian Jones became the first to circle the world nonstop in a hot-air balloon, landing safely in Egypt.

Uliassi -- described by friends and family as the consummate inventor with a drawer full of ideas at home -- began his love affair with ballooning as a kid. He earned his ballooning license by the time he was 18 and put off college to run his own ballooning company.

During his years at the Illinois Institute of Technology, the idea of circling the globe began to germinate. He quit his job to make this year's attempt.

*The [Associated Press](#) contributed to this report.*



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