

Balloon pilots arrive in New Mexico after historic flight

February 2 2015, by Russell Contreras And Susan Montoya Bryan



This Jan. 8, 2015 photo provided by Tami Bradley-Two Eagles Balloon Team, shows pilots from left, Troy Bradley of Albuquerque, N.M., and Leonid Tiukhtyaev of Russia, before they lift off in a gas balloon in Saga, Japan. The Two Eagles pilots have traveled farther and longer in a gas balloon than anyone in history in a bid to remove the qualifiers that have complicated a century of record keeping in long-distance ballooning. Now they're aiming for a safe landing on the beaches of Baja California. (AP Photo/Tami Bradley-Two Eagles Balloon Team)

Two pilots who completed a record-breaking flight across the Pacific Ocean in a helium-filled balloon returned to New Mexico on Sunday to the sounds of mariachi music and an enthusiastic welcome

A [large crowd](#) greeted Troy Bradley of Albuquerque and Leonid Tiukhtyaev of Russia after they finished the historic journey a day earlier.

Bradley had been planning the trans-Pacific flight for 15 years, and his wife said he was driven by a goal of doing something better than anyone else in the world.

"Our flight was absolutely amazing," Bradley told reporters and supporters.

The accomplished pilot had wanted to fly farther and longer in a gas balloon than anyone in history. He and Tiukhtyaev staked their claim to those records during a nearly seven-day trip across the Pacific.

Their adventure ended just after sunrise Saturday when they touched down in the water off the coast of Mexico's Baja California.

Initial plans called for a picture-perfect landing on the beach, but winds pushing parallel to the coast forced the pilots to drop their trailing ropes into the ocean to help slow the balloon for a controlled water landing.

"That was the hardest part of the trip," Bradley said.

Mexican authorities helped to secure the balloon and capsule.

Bradley and Tiukhtyaev lifted off from Japan last Sunday. By Friday, they beat what's considered the "holy grail" of ballooning achievements, the 137-hour duration record set in 1978 during the first balloon flight

across the Atlantic. They also easily exceeded the distance record of 5,209 miles (8,380 kilometers) set during the first trans-Pacific [flight](#) in 1981.



This image from video shows the recovery boatS collecting the balloon envelope 4 miles offshore in Baja California about 300 miles north of the popular beach destination of Cabo San Lucas Saturday Jan. 31, 2015. The Two Eagles pilots Troy Bradley and Leonid Tiukhtyaev have been picked up by the fishing boat and taken to shore. They are fine, but are being checked out onshore by paramedics as a precaution. The recovery team is working with Mexican authorities on retrieving the capsule and equipment from the landing location in the water. (AP Photo/Richard Berry)

By the time they landed, the pilots had traveled 6,646 miles (10,695 kilometers) over six days, 16 hours and 38 minutes.

Asked if he and Bradley were still friends after such a long trip, Tiukhtyaev said no. "We stayed brothers," said Tiukhtyaev, who holds

his own records and has participated in many long-distance gas [balloon](#) races in the United States and Europe.

Growing up in the former Soviet Union, Tiukhtyaev said he never thought about breaking the record with an American pilot. "But I've always dreamed about it since I was a child," he said in Russian.



This Jan. 27, 2015 photo provided by the Two Eagles Balloon Team shows the sunrise as the helium-filled balloon carrying Troy Bradley of Albuquerque and Leonid Tiukhtyaev of Russia crosses the Pacific Ocean after taking off from Saga, Japan. The two pilots landed safely off the coast of Mexico early Saturday, Jan. 31, 2015 after an audacious, nearly 7,000-mile-long trip across the Pacific Ocean that shattered two long-standing records for ballooning. The pilots landed 4 miles offshore in Baja California about 300 miles north of the popular beach destination of Cabo San Lucas. (AP Photo/Two Eagles Balloon Team)

The original route took the pilots on a path from Japan, across the Pacific Ocean and toward the Pacific Northwest before they encountered a wall of high pressure. They then made a sweeping right turn and headed south along the California coast for the Mexico landing.

"We enjoy great views," Bradley said. "We took some great photos."



In this Jan. 26, 2015 photo provided by the Two Eagles Balloon Team, the helium-filled balloon carrying Troy Bradley of Albuquerque and Leonid Tiukhtyaev of Russia passes over Mt. Fuji after taking off from Saga, Japan. The two pilots landed safely off the coast of Mexico early Saturday, Jan. 31, 2015 after an audacious, nearly 7,000-mile-long trip across the Pacific Ocean that shattered two long-standing records for ballooning. The pilots landed 4 miles offshore in Baja California about 300 miles north of the popular beach destination of Cabo San Lucas. (AP Photo/Two Eagles Balloon Team)



Tami Bradley and her daughter Savannah pose for a picture in Albuquerque, N.M., after celebrating word that pilot Troy Bradley was safe and in a fishing boat headed to the Baja California shore following the water landing of the Two Eagles Balloon on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2015. The balloon surpassed a pair of major distance and duration ballooning records while during a six-day journey across the Pacific Ocean. (AP Photo/Susan Montoya Bryan)



Visitors to the Anderson Abruzzo International Balloon Museum in Albuquerque, N.M., are directed to the mission control center for the Two Eagles Balloon flight on Friday, Jan. 30, 2015. The balloon has surpassed world records for distance and duration during its trip across the Pacific Ocean. It was scheduled to land on Mexico's Baja California peninsula on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2015. (AP Photo/Susan Montoya Bryan)



Members of the Two Eagles Balloon team mission control located in Albuquerque, N.M., discuss the balloon's route as landing preparations are made Friday, Jan. 30, 2015. The balloon has surpassed world records for distance and duration during its trip across the Pacific Ocean. It was scheduled to land on Mexico's Baja California peninsula on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2015. (AP Photo/Susan Montoya Bryan)



Irina Tiukhtyaev, center, and Margarita Shmidt, right, the wife and daughter of Russian balloon pilot Leonid Tiukhtyaev, discuss the landing of the Two Eagles Balloon after monitoring the final moments of the flight at mission control in Albuquerque, N.M., on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2015. Tiukhtyaev and fellow pilot Troy Bradley landed after crossing the Pacific Ocean and surpassing a pair of major ballooning records. (AP Photo/Susan Montoya Bryan)



The Two Eagles Balloon mission control team gets ready to pop the cork on a bottle of champagne in Albuquerque, N.M, following the successful landing of the helium-filled balloon just off the coast of Baja California on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2015. Two pilots, Troy Bradley of Albuquerque and Leonid Tiukhtyaev of Russia, in a helium-filled balloon landed safely off the coast of Mexico early Saturday after an audacious, nearly 7,000-mile (11,265-kilometer)-long trip across the Pacific Ocean that shattered two long-standing records for ballooning. (AP Photo/Susan Montoya Bryan)



Two Eagles Balloon mission control director Steve Shope discusses the landing of the helium-filled balloon after it crossed the Pacific Ocean en route to surpassing two major ballooning records for distance and duration during a news conference in Albuquerque, N.M., on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2015. Shope said the balloon touched down in the water about 4 miles off the coast of Baja California on Saturday morning. (AP Photo/Susan Montoya Bryan)



This Jan. 26, 2015 photo provided by the Two Eagles Balloon Team shows a view upward of the helium-filled balloon carrying Troy Bradley of Albuquerque and Leonid Tiukhtyaev of Russia as it crosses the Pacific Ocean after taking off from Saga, Japan. The two pilots landed safely off the coast of Mexico early Saturday, Jan. 31, 2015 after an audacious, nearly 7,000-mile-long trip across the Pacific Ocean that shattered two long-standing records for ballooning. The pilots landed 4 miles offshore in Baja California about 300 miles north of the popular beach destination of Cabo San Lucas. (AP Photo/Two Eagles Balloon Team)



In this Jan. 26, 2015 photo provided by the Two Eagles Balloon Team, the helium-filled balloon carrying Troy Bradley of Albuquerque and Leonid Tiukhtyaev of Russia crosses the Pacific Ocean after taking off from Saga, Japan. The two pilots landed safely off the coast of Mexico early Saturday, Jan. 31, 2015, after an audacious, nearly 7,000-mile-long trip across the Pacific Ocean that shattered two long-standing records for ballooning. The pilots landed 4 miles offshore in Baja California about 300 miles north of the popular beach destination of Cabo San Lucas. (AP Photo/Two Eagles Balloon Team)

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