

Piper PA-25 Pawnee, G-ATFR, 28 September 1997

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Aircraft Type and Registration:	Piper PA-25 Pawnee, G-ATFR
No & Type of Engines:	1 Lycoming O-320-B2C piston engine
Year of Manufacture:	1960
Date & Time (UTC):	28 September 1997 at 1443 hrs
Location:	Milfield Gliding Site near Wooler, Northumberland
Type of Flight:	Private
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1 - Passengers - None
Injuries:	Crew - None - Passengers - N/A
Nature of Damage:	Minor damage to left wing, flaps and aileron horn
Commander's Licence:	Private Pilot's Licence
Commander's Age:	49 years
Commander's Flying Experience:	358 hours (of which 40 were on type) Last 90 days - 28 hours Last 28 days - 2 hours
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot, and supplementary inquiries by AAIB

The aircraft was engaged in glider aerotowing operations. After carrying out the first tow of the day, the glider was released at 2000 feet and the tug pilot returned for a normal approach and landing. The wind was SSW/10-12 kt with light turbulence due to thermal activity. A normal approach was made into wind with full flap, and the aircraft was flared normally at about 50 kt. The pilot reported that on touchdown, as the weight came onto the wheels, he heard a loud bang and the left wing 'went down'. Full right aileron, and aftstick, was applied in an effort to keep the left wing up, however as the aircraft slowed the left wing contacted the grass field and full right rudder was insufficient to prevent the aircraft from slowly ground looping to the left through 180° before coming to rest. The pilot was uninjured and switched off the fuel, magnetos and master switch before vacating the cockpit.

A witness, who had been acting as the forward signaller for the aerotow launches, described the approach and touchdown as normal. After the aircraft had touched down and rolled a short distance he heard a bang and saw the left wing drop almost to the ground. As the aircraft slowed, it began to ground loop around the left wing, coming to rest in the opposite direction to the landing.

Post accident inspection revealed a tensile failure through the eye-end attachment hole at the damper housing end of the combined bungee spring and damper unit on the left landing gear. The pilot reported that the aircraft was used exclusively for such aerotow operations and averaged some 6 flights per hour from the 'hard and uneven conditions' of this airfield.