



Greg Hughes
Aviation Accident Investigator
Western Pacific Region

Date: March 20, 2026

Subject: WPR26LA114 / Record of Conversation

Contact: [REDACTED], Pilot

I spoke on the phone with [REDACTED], the pilot/owner of the accident airplane. The purpose of the call was to clarify and document the pilot's account of damage sustained to his aircraft at a remote airstrip, and to confirm which damage occurred during the subsequent accident flight. The pilot had previously completed and submitted a completed and signed NTSB accident report form.

The pilot stated that his aircraft is a tailwheel type, with the tailwheel mounted on a flat leaf spring that extends from the fuselage approximately one foot to eighteen inches. He reported that after landing at an unimproved remote strip, he taxied the airplane while looking for the best takeoff line. The surface was rocky, and as he taxied he felt the rear end begin to "bump" significantly. He stopped, exited, and found the tailwheel spring had broken about halfway along its length at a location where there is a dimple in the spring steel. He described the fracture as "a crystalline fracture," like a shear cut, with no evidence of bending.

He stated that when the leaf spring failed, the chains to the steering arms were ripped off, and the tailwheel assembly ended up a few feet behind where it should be. He retrieved the assembly. The airplane was sitting low at the tail, with a small portion of the spring still protruding, which had scratched and slightly damaged the bottom of the rudder, but he considered that damage "not too significant." He stated he is an A&P and that he inspected the area, concluding it was suitable to fly. He said it was not deformed in a major way, noting only slight deformation, and that after wiggling and gripping the structure, it seemed solid and retained integrity, so he decided it was okay.

He agreed to take photos of the broken parts at the tail section and the fracture surface (those photos were received later the same day as the interview). He added that there is now more damage on the rudder attributable to the subsequent accident when the airplane went over onto its tail or back, crushing the top of the rudder, and when it was brought back down, it dropped heavily and banged the bottom of the rudder.

He stated that, after the tailwheel spring broke, he picked up the tailwheel, put it in the airplane, and flew the aircraft home. He explained his decision-making context: he was "in the middle of nowhere," with no civilization within 20 or 30 miles and no roads. He had a sleeping bag and water, which he typically carries, but he did not want to spend the night there, and that influenced his decision. He said that, in retrospect, waiting until the next morning would have been preferable. He stated he had cell service and spoke with two or three backcountry pilot friends about an hour before sunset, but none could reach their airplanes and get to him before dark, and they avoid night flying in those aircraft. He also contacted a friend with a helicopter, but he was out of town. He described the situation as one where "everything was kind of piling up."

Regarding the broader damage to the airplane, he stated that when the airplane nosed over during the accident sequence at his home airport, the wing spars were bent "a little bit," probably a few inches, and "everything's damaged in there," including spars being "a little bit bent," resulting in substantial damage overall. He said the propeller is composite and that it did not bend or break but was scuffed. He noted the nose cone (spinner) was smashed.

He reported the aircraft is only two years old, with approximately 150 hours of accumulated flight time. An annual inspection was performed about a month or two prior. He stated he believes there is "a little history" with these tailwheel springs. After speaking with others, and particularly a mechanic who works on Scouts, he learned of multiple similar failures. He quoted that mechanic as saying a friend with a Scout had "broken three of those things in the same place," particularly in backcountry operations with rocks. He said he thinks "that was a failure that shouldn't have happened," and has considered taking the spring to a metallurgy shop for fracture analysis, but agreed not to send or deform the part pending NTSB direction.

He stated he is an engineer but not a metallurgist, and that he believed fracture analysis could determine whether the failure was due to fatigue, overload, or a material defect. He agreed to take and send photos of the damage and to provide any additional information requested. Photos were received from the pilot the same

day, which depict the substantial damage to the airplane sustained in the accident sequence, as well as the fractured tailwheel spring and assembly.

The pilot confirmed that the fractured tailwheel spring failure occurred prior to the accident flight, and that there were no additional mechanical defects or anomalies with the airplane experienced during the accident flight.