Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Gettysburg, Pennsylvania	**Accident Number:**	ERA26LA122
Date & Time:	February 21, 2026, 11:59 Local	**Registration:**	N1020S
Aircraft:	Hughes 269A	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Defining Event:	Loss of control on ground	**Injuries:**	2 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Instructional		

Analysis

The student pilot and the flight instructor performed a preflight inspection of the helicopter and then moved it from the hangar onto an area of soft, muddy ground outside. They pushed the helicopter as far away from the hangar as they could due to the soft ground, about 25 to 30 ft. The student pilot described that where the helicopter was positioned, it was “leaning back” with the aft portion of both skids several inches deep in the mud. During the subsequent takeoff attempt, the student pilot noted that the helicopter required the application of additional engine power than he had observed during previous takeoffs before it became “light on the skids.” During a postaccident interview, he postulated that the helicopter might have been “stuck in the mud.” The flight instructor then felt that the helicopter’s tail might strike the ground, so he nudged the cyclic control forward. Immediately after, the helicopter began moving forward toward the hangar in a significantly nose low attitude.

Despite their subsequent control inputs, neither pilot was able to arrest the helicopter’s forward motion and it struck the hangar less than 2 seconds later and came to rest on its right side. The helicopter’s fuselage, tailboom, and main rotor blades were substantially damaged during the accident sequence. The flight instructor reported that there were no preimpact mechanical malfunctions or failures of the helicopter that would have precluded normal operation, and FAA inspectors who examined the helicopter after the accident were unable to find evidence of a preimpact mechanical malfunction or failure of the flight controls that would have precluded normal operation. Based on this information, it is likely that the helicopter suddenly dislodged itself from the soft, muddy ground during the takeoff when the flight instructor applied nose down cyclic input, which resulted in an unexpected, rapid forward movement and collision with the hangar. Had the flight instructor recognized the abnormal amount of engine power being applied by the student and discontinued the takeoff attempt, it is likely that the accident could have been avoided.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

The flight instructor's failure to identify the excess power required to lift off from soft and muddy ground, which resulted in a loss of control and subsequent collision with a hangar during takeoff.

Findings

Personnel issues	Monitoring environment - Instructor/check pilot
Aircraft	(general) - Not attained/maintained

Factual Information

History of Flight

Takeoff	Loss of control on ground (Defining event)
Takeoff	Collision with terr/obj (non-CFIT)

Flight instructor Information

Certificate:	Commercial; Flight instructor	**Age:**	49,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	None	**Seat Occupied:**	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	**Restraint Used:**	3-point
Instrument Rating(s):	Helicopter	**Second Pilot Present:**	Yes
Instructor Rating(s):	Helicopter	**Toxicology Performed:**	
Medical Certification:	Class 2 With waivers/limitations	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	January 12, 2026
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	February 5, 2026
Flight Time:	7544 hours (Total, all aircraft), 628 hours (Total, this make and model), 7420 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 79 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 28 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft)		

Student pilot Information

Certificate:	Student	**Age:**	52,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	None	**Seat Occupied:**	Right
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	**Restraint Used:**	3-point
Instrument Rating(s):	None	**Second Pilot Present:**	Yes
Instructor Rating(s):	None	**Toxicology Performed:**	
Medical Certification:	Class 2 With waivers/limitations	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	February 18, 2025
Occupational Pilot:	No	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	
Flight Time:	62 hours (Total, all aircraft), 34 hours (Total, this make and model), 15 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 11 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Hughes	**Registration:**	N1020S
Model/Series:	269A Undesignated Series	**Aircraft Category:**	Helicopter
Year of Manufacture:	1966	**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	**Serial Number:**	26-0467
Landing Gear Type:	Skid	**Seats:**	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	August 17, 2025 Annual	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	1670 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		**Engines:**	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	5618.9 Hrs at time of accident	**Engine Manufacturer:**	Lycoming
ELT:	Not installed	**Engine Model/Series:**	HIO-360-B1A
Registered Owner:	Tactical Turtle LLC	**Rated Power:**	180 Horsepower
Operator:	Tactical Turtle LLC	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	**Condition of Light:**	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KRSP,1847 ft msl	**Distance from Accident Site:**	14 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	11:54 Local	**Direction from Accident Site:**	223°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	**Visibility**	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	7 knots / None	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	Unknown / None
Wind Direction:	320°	**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	Unknown / N/A
Altimeter Setting:	29.95 inches Hg	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	4°C / 0°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Gettysburg, PA	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	None
Destination:	Gettysburg, PA (W05)	**Type of Clearance:**	None
Departure Time:		**Type of Airspace:**	Class G

Airport Information

Airport:	None None	**Runway Surface Type:**	
Airport Elevation:	542 ft msl	**Runway Surface Condition:**	Soft
Runway Used:		**IFR Approach:**	None
Runway Length/Width:		**VFR Approach/Landing:**	None

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	2 Minor	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:		**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:		**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	2 Minor	**Latitude, Longitude:**	39.81853,-77.25508

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Monville, Timothy
Additional Participating Persons:	James E. Williams; FAA/FSDO; Harrisburg, PA
Original Publish Date:	June 25, 2026
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class 4
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=202481