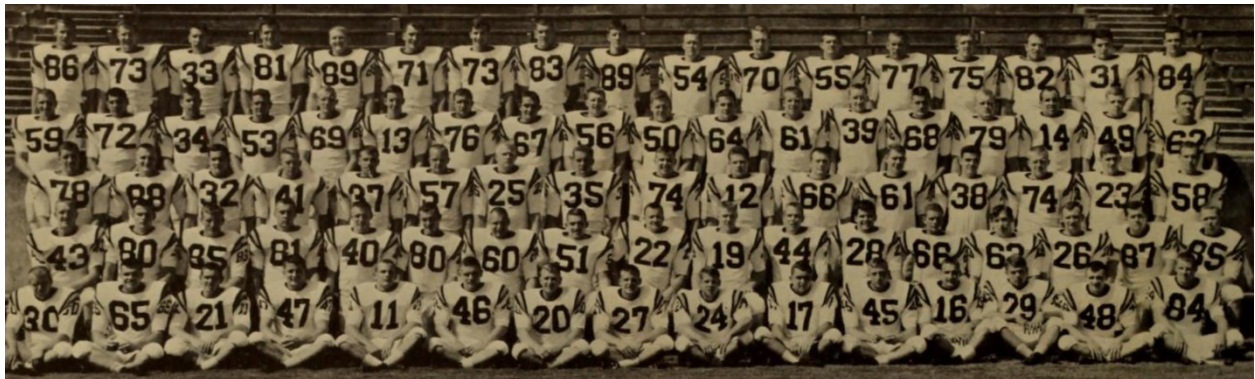


Short Round

When firing a mortar, the most basic of the Army's indirect fire weapons, a short round is one which fails to fully fire its propelling charge. Short rounds can be caused by foreign matter like moisture, sand, or mud interfering with the mortar's firing components. As a result, the round falls short of its intended target, often with tragic effect.

Leon Darvin Flanders from Winnsboro was an end on the 1958 Mount Zion Institute team that won the Class A football state championship. His quarterback was Mac Renwick. Both young men would continue their educations and their football careers at Clemson—and both are listed on Clemson's Scroll of Honor. Darvin Flanders was an economics major and member of the Class of 1964. He played end on Coach Frank Howard's football teams from 1960 through 1963. In his final season, the Tigers reeled off five straight wins, closing out the season with a 24-20 victory over South Carolina. Flanders also participated in Army ROTC, earning a second lieutenant's commission.



Flanders, second row far right, number 85, and his 1963 Tiger teammates.

Flanders married the former Gloria Tilley of Anderson. After graduating from Clemson, Flanders attended the Infantry Officer's Basic Course at Fort Polk, Louisiana and then headed to Fort Walters, Texas for rotary-wing flight training. He earned his helicopter pilot's wings at Fort Rucker, Alabama in July 1965. In November, Flanders headed to Vietnam where he was assigned to the 145th Airlift Platoon at Nha Trang. The primary mission of the 145th was supporting Project Delta. Delta was a Special Forces reconnaissance outfit which was airlifted into remote Viet Cong held areas in order to call in air strikes, conduct bomb damage assessments, and carry out hunter-killer operations.

Operating in a demanding environment, Flanders quickly gained the reputation as a good pilot and so he was naturally given the toughest missions. On May 9, 1966, Flanders was dispatched

to evacuate a reconnaissance team from an abandoned village called Bo Tuc. Shortly after the team had moved into the village, a Viet Cong battalion marched in and set up camp all around them. As Flanders approached in his Huey helicopter, a friendly air strike was in progress and the recon team was unable to move without exposing its position. Flanders made four low passes over the area to determine the team's position. As he guided his chopper into the "hot" landing zone, intense enemy small arms fire hit his aircraft. A bullet smashed through the chin bubble, ricocheted, and hit Flanders in the foot. The chopper spun a couple of turns, but Flanders and his copilot were able to bring it back into control. Thinking quickly, Flanders flew out of range of the enemy fire and then radioed for another airstrike. The second strike ripped into the Viet Cong and enabled the Special Forces team to escape. Fortunately, the bullet that hit Flanders's foot had expended most of its velocity. It inflicted a severe bruise but did not penetrate his boot—or his foot. For his outstanding flying ability and devotion to duty, Flanders was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

A few days later, Flanders was ordered to fly resupply missions, which seemed less hazardous duty. On June 17, Flanders flew an "ash and trash" mission to the Special Forces camp at Ban Me Thuot, in the central highlands of South Vietnam. After making his deliveries and before heading back to his home base at Nha Trang, Flanders and his copilot stopped in the camp's mess tent for breakfast. When an alarm sounded, the two pilots headed toward a shelter. A short mortar round landed nearby and its shrapnel mortally wounded Flanders.

In tribute to the decorated pilot, the airfield at Dong Ba Thin was later named Flanders Field. Family members and friends endowed an ROTC scholarship at Clemson in memory of Flanders and two other Winnsboro men who were lost in Vietnam. Since 1975, the Renwick-Flanders Award, named for the erstwhile teammates, has recognized the Tigers' most improved football player.

In a ceremony on Bowman Field in 1966, First Lieutenant Flanders's widow Gloria was presented his Distinguished Flying Cross and the Bronze Star medal for valor. Flanders was also awarded the Air Medal with six oak leaf clusters, Army Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Republic of Vietnam Military Merit Medal, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal. In addition to his widow, Flanders was survived by his parents, a sister, and a brother. He is buried in Anderson's New Silver Brook Cemetery.

