Silver Wings History

The Fort Benning Command Exhibition Parachute Team has a long and colorful history. Organized in 1965, the Team can trace its origins back to the inception of the Fort Benning Sport Parachute Club in 1958, which included several members of the Airborne-Air Mobility Department.

In 1958, under LTC Guy Campbell, Chief of Tower Branch, U.S. Army Airborne School, Jack Luse, Roy Edwards, David Clark, and Edward Burkholter trained at Fryar Drop Zone. Under the tutelage of CPT David Shaden from Fort Rucker, Alabama and with both fixed and rotary wing aircraft from Lawson Army Airfield, these men learned the fundamentals of freefall parachuting. From this small nucleus of jumpers, the Fort Benning Sport Parachute Club (FBSPC) was formed.

Though still in its infancy, the Club performed its first demonstration jump soon thereafter. On 14 Feb 1959, CH (MAJ) Thomas Waldie exited a Cessna aircraft at 6,000 feet over the King's School of Aviation off of Victory Highway, Columbus, Georgia in support of the Columbus March of Dimes campaign. He performed a "figure eight", opened his main canopy at 2,000 feet, and then landed in front of the crowd.

The FBSPC continued to grow, and many of its members came from the Airborne-Air Mobility Department. In 1960, several members of the Club competed in the U.S. National Parachute Meet. By 1962, demonstration jumps by the Club were fairly common and in May 1962, Fort Benning hosted its first parachute meet between the Fort Rucker Parachute Club and the Fort Benning Parachute Club.

In 1965, COL Lamar Welch, director of the Airborne Department, expanded Problem 5000, Airborne Orientation, to include a freefall demonstration. 2LT Allen Becker organized and headed the first "Problem 5000" Team, which is currently referred to as the Airborne 5000 or Airborne in Action demonstration. On 31 Aug 1965, SSG Richard Morgan landed on Eubanks Field, marking the start of the Command Exhibition Parachute Team.

The Parachute Team and Club continued to operate side-by-side for many years. Most of the Team members were also Club members. In 1970, Ft. Benning sent a 4 man relative work team to the U.S. National Parachute Meet, of which three were from the Airborne Department. In 1978, the first canopy formation on Fort Benning, a biplane, was formed with the one Club member and one Team member.

At first the Team was referred to as the “Problem 5000” jumpers, which quickly evolved into the “Airborne 5000” jumpers, and “Airborne 5000” team. They remained the “Airborne 5000” for several years, but to the local papers the Team had a variety of names: “The Air Mobility Departments Skydivers”; “The Airborne Department’s Skydivers”; “The Airborne Department’s Freefall Team”; and “The Airborne Department’s Military Freefall Team”.

Finally, in Jan 1970, COL Villa, became Chief of the Airborne Department. Under his direction, the Team became the “Command Exhibition Parachute Team” and shortly afterwards became nicknamed the “Silver Wings”.

Through the 80’s, 90’s and into the new millennium, the mission of the “Command Exhibition Parachute Team”, the “Silver Wings” is to demonstrate advanced freefall techniques, while being available for research and development of start-of-the-art precision freefall techniques and equipment, and to represent the United States Army Infantry Center and Schools at both on and off post parachute demonstrations and competitions. Since the first demonstration jump on 31 Aug 1965, the “Silver Wings” have inspired countless airborne students, supported Fort Benning events with their demonstrations and have been ambassadors of the Airborne School, Ft. Benning and the Army throughout the United States and the World. Now, after an extended hiatus from 13 July 2000 to 17 April 2004, The Silver Wings are back in action under the new team black and silver canopies that proudly display the bold blue “Follow Me” patch, the well know symbol of the Fort Benning, U.S. Army Infantry Center and Schools. A new team comprised of NCOs, Officers, and Enlisted, that proudly undertake the responsibility of representing not only the great Soldiers that comprise Fort Benning, but also in representing those who serve and sacrifice everyday, past, present and future in our great Army. AIRBORNE!

HUNTERS FROM THE SKY!