

VIRAT, DARMI AND HEENA GET ARMY CHIEF'S PAT

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Virat the horse is with the President's Bodyguard and has served as the Commandant's charger. Special arrangement

Virat, Darmi and Heena were awarded the Chief of the Army Staff Commendation on the eve of Army Day on January 15 for their exemplary service. Virat is a horse with the President's Bodyguard (PBG), while Darmi and Heena are Army dogs.

Virat, a Hanoverian breed, was issued to the PBG on September 12, 2000. He performed his duties as the Commandant's charger for over a decade and awed spectators, including foreign dignitaries, with his trademark poise and confidence, an official said.

"Within a short span of time, he displayed the potential and temperament to become the most trustworthy parade horse," the official noted. "During Republic Day Parade and Beating Retreat ceremony in 2021, the horse performed exceptionally well despite his old age."

"From the beautiful arch of his neck right down to his graceful trot, to the wisdom in his eyes, Virat is a horse like no other," said an officer who has served with the PBG.

The Army has eight different trades of dogs: tracker, guard, mine detection, explosive detection, infantry patrol, avalanche rescue operations, search and rescue, assault and narcotic detection. Darmi was pressed into service for a search and rescue operation at a post on the Siachen Glacier on April 25 last year.

Undeterred by the extreme cold at an altitude of around 16,500 feet, low atmospheric oxygen and high intensity winds, Darmi confirmed the exact location of Fibre Reinforced Plastic (FRP) that was damaged, dislocated and buried under 25 feet of hard snow. This helped in finding six soldiers and three porters, an officer explained.

Heena, a Labrador retriever, is a tracker aged five years and is highly loyal, even-tempered, intelligent, obedient and exceptionally reliable, the officer said. In February 2021, Heena was part of an extensive search operation along the Line of Control in Kashmir after an infiltrator was eliminated, the officer said.

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