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In 1943, when Major General DeWitt C. Smith Jr. was a newly commissioned lieutenant, he began his World War II experience in Europe as an armored infantry rifle platoon leader and company commander in the 4th Armored Division. In campaigns extending from Normandy to Czechoslovakia, he served mainly with spearhead elements of General Patton’s Third Army.

During the course of the war, Lieutenant Smith had many opportunities to observe General Patton’s interaction with troops. He heard him speak on a few occasions, pondering his teachings and becoming quite inspired by the general’s leadership. So much so he recorded his personal recollections of the particular traits and techniques of leadership displayed by General Patton during the Allies’ historic march

Traits of a combat leader

through the German heartland in 1944. Here’s what he recorded:

- * General Patton was visible; he showed himself to his men.

- * He gathered units and groups of men together whenever possible and spoke to them.

- * He spent much more time praising and rewarding his soldiers than in finding fault.

- * He defended his soldiers and his units to all the rest of the world.

- * He decentralized soldiering to his subordinate commanders, thus building their self-confidence, allowing them maximum freedom for initiative, and giving them the satisfaction that comes from responsibility. Along with this, he gave them the tools to do the job.

- * He engaged personally in teaching and training his men.

- * He turned administration over to his staff (as was always clear), saving

his own time for reflecting, training, leading, and exhorting.

- * He emphasized diversity, tradition, esprit, and unit cohesiveness.

- * He verified, through his major subordinates, that the troops knew what was going on.

- * He insisted on tough discipline in combat as well as in training, with particular emphasis on personal cleanliness, appearance, and behavior, and maintenance of weapons and equipment.

- * His combat tactics, capitalizing on speed and aggressiveness, were aimed at winning quickly, thus saving lives.

General Patton’s leadership traits and techniques were quite effective indeed. If you lead in a volatile environment, it could benefit you greatly to emulate as many of them as you can.

~ The End ~