

# Poor Choices

By SrA John Hill, Beale AFB, Calif.

**T**he story I am telling is both tragic and true, but more importantly preventable. This is the story of a childhood friend of mine named Jason.

Jason's life was cut short this past summer because of the choices he made — or for that matter, didn't make.

If you take anything from this story I hope it is the fact that you need to be prepared for anything that might be thrown at you. A fitting quote that I was told once is "Failure to prepare, is preparing to fail," and this story is a perfect example of that.

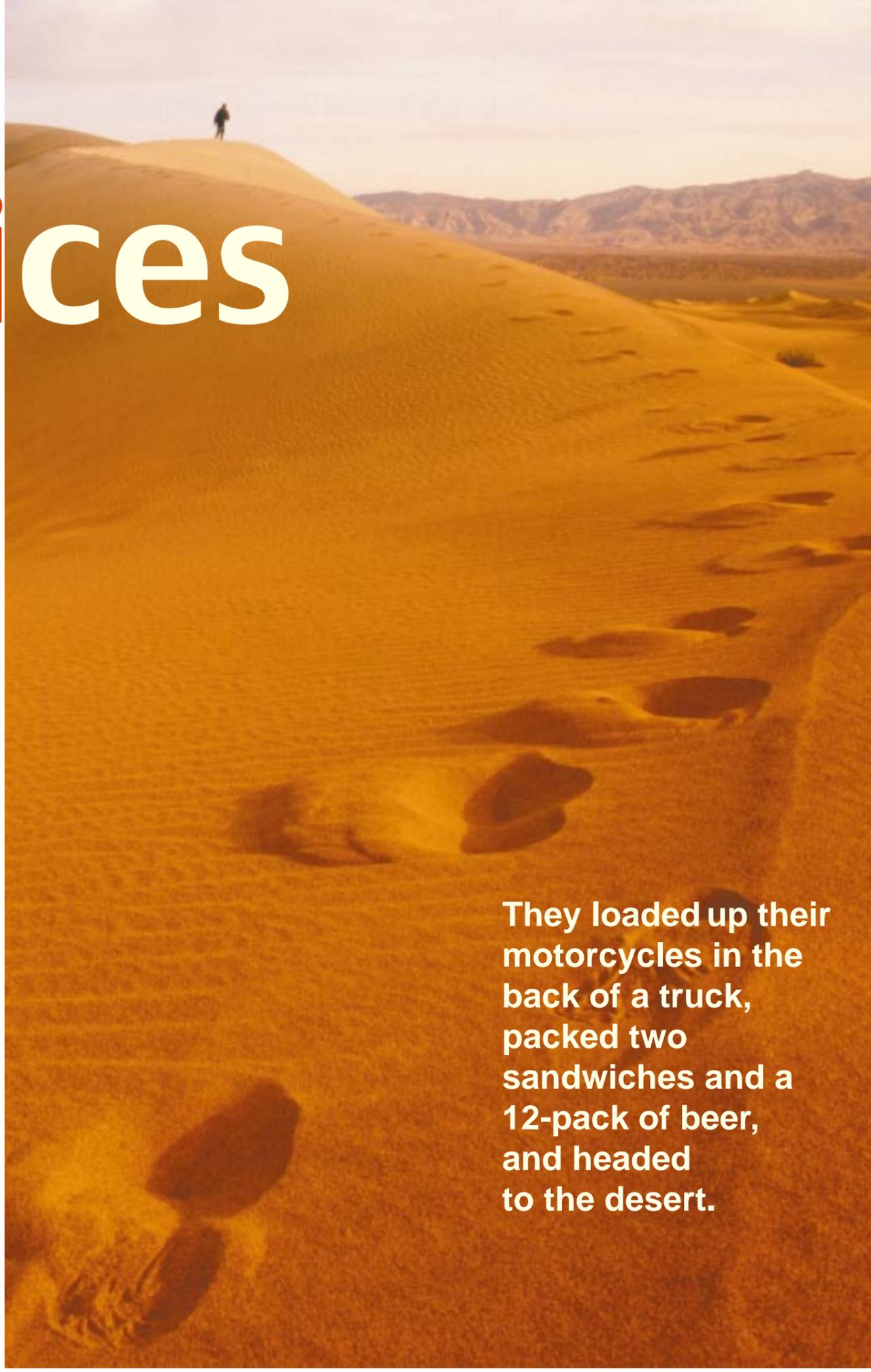
Jason was 30 years old, married with two kids, a 10-month-old and a 2-month-old. One day last summer Jason and his 29-year-old cousin Mark decided they wanted to go riding motorcycles in their favorite location. This was nothing out of the ordinary for the two because they had been doing this for years now.

They loaded up their motorcycles in the back of Mark's truck, packed two sandwiches and a 12-pack of beer, and headed to the desert. The spot they loved to ride was in the middle of nowhere, 55 miles east of Phoenix. In hopes of avoiding the midday heat, they arrived at their desired location at approximately 6 a.m.

They rode until about 10 a.m. when they decided to return to the truck to eat lunch. After about an hour, they returned to their riding. They rode for several more hours.

At about 4 p.m. they decided to leave. After finishing up the last beer from the 12-pack, they loaded up the motorcycles and headed home. They didn't get far. Their truck got stuck in the sand and after 2 hours of trying to dig the truck out, they were both exhausted and frustrated. Figuring there was nothing more they could do, they made the decision to walk to a ranch house that was about 10 miles away.

Two miles into their walk, Jason could no longer continue. He was vomiting, extremely dehydrated, and beginning to cramp se-



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verely. Mark decided to carry Jason back to the truck and leave him there with the air conditioning on. Mark headed out as the sun went down. He too was dehydrated and very disoriented.

Arriving at the ranch house at around 1 a.m., Mark informed the residents of his situation and they contacted the local sheriff. The sheriff's department sent out a helicopter to look for the truck. However, due to a severe dust storm, they were not able to find the vehicle. The search was stopped for 5 hours while the storm passed. Once it was over, they left the ranch and went to look for Jason and the vehicle. When they arrived at the vehicle, Jason was already dead.

They found him lying in the seat with large black lesions all over his face and body. The coroner

determined that Jason didn't die from heat stroke or dehydration like they initially thought. It was determined he died of carbon monoxide poisoning. You see, some time during the storm, the muffler became buried by sand, which did not allow for the exhaust of the truck to properly ventilate, which in turn killed Jason.

This tragedy could have been avoided if they would have brought a few simple items. For example: several gallons of water, maps, Global Positioning System, food, a cell phone, radios, and/or a small shovel. These items cost around \$300. Instead they brought beer and two sandwiches. They also failed to notify anyone of where they were going and did not bother to check the weather report which had forecasted a large storm for that day.

The moral of the story is that \$300 worth of gear and the 15 minutes of time that it would have taken to inform someone of their location and plans could have saved Jason's life. Just because you're familiar and comfortable with the location doesn't mean you don't need to prepare for the worst case scenario. There is no such thing as being over prepared. The alternative is death and death is final. ▶

*For more information on Dehydration, Heat Stroke, or Carbon Monoxide Poisoning please visit: <http://www.rice.edu/~jenky/sports/dehydration.html> or <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/cofsh.html>*