

Bittersweet reunion for Aptos mother

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — Emma Stephens-Bell's joy at seeing two of her four sons return from Operation Desert Storm was diminished by the loss of a third son who was killed in the war.

All four of the Aptos woman's sons took part in the war. Edmund Stephens, 31, and Timothy, 25, were sent home early and arrived Wednesday. Willard, 30, was scheduled to arrive Thursday.

Together, they will carry the body of their brother, Christopher, a 27-year-old staff sergeant who was killed when his

Bradley Fighting Vehicle was destroyed by heavy-arms fire.

"I'm glad to have them home — but I'm sad about the reason they're here," Stephens-Bell said.

She said she had been told by military officials the body of her son was at Dover Air Force Base, Del., but didn't know when it would arrive home. Funeral arrangements were pending.

The Stephens brothers received special leave to return to Texas City, near Houston, for Christopher's funeral. Christopher's widow and four sons, ages 9, 8, 6 and 2, live in Texas City.

Stephens-Bell, who recently arrived in Houston from her home in Aptos, said she's still unclear about the circumstances of his death.

One of her sons had received eyewitness accounts from soldiers in Christopher's platoon that differed from the version the military provided, she said. The family has refused to elaborate.

Timothy Stephens said he was particularly angry he was not notified of his brother's death for five days, and then from family in Houston, not military officials in Saudi Arabia.

"I was lying down when my platoon ser-

geant told me to call my wife," he said. "I knew it was something bad, that something happened to one of my brothers. I'm right here in Saudi, about 20 miles away, and my wife knew about it before I found out."

Timothy said he was not sure of the cause his brother died for.

"Why were we there? What were we fighting for? I just don't understand," he said. "All I know is I'm in the Army, and I had a job to do. I love my country, and if I had to do it again, I guess I would. But still, today, I don't know why we were fighting."