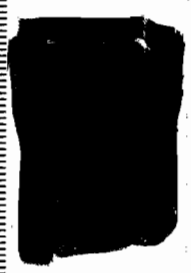
CSI REPORT

No. 7

World War II Division Commanders

by

Lieutenant Colonel Gary Wade





COMBAT
STUDIES
INSTITUTE

83-CSI-2578

CSI REPORTS are short-term research papers prepared in response to official inquiries. REPORTS are based mainly on secondary sources and provide basic information on the subject under consideration. The views expressed in a CSI REPORT are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Department of the Army or the Department of Defense.

COMBAT STUDIES INSTITUTE

Mission

The Combat Studies Institute was established on 18 June 1979 as a separate, department-level activity within the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, for the purpose of accomplishing the following missions:

1. Conduct research on historical topics pertinent to the current doctrinal concerns of the Army and publish and distribute the results of such research in a variety of formats to the Active Army and Reserve components.

2. Prepare and present instruction in military history at CGSC and assist other CGSC departments in integrating applicable military history materials into their resident and nonresident instruction.

3. Act as the TRADOC proponent for the development and coordination of an integrated, progressive program of military history instruction in the TRADOC service school system.

One of the most spectacular feats of the United States Army during World War II was its expansion from a force of 235,000 men in May 1940, to nearly six million men by 1945. No less a personage than Winston Churchill, the great wartime leader of Britain, declared that the magnificent American management of the growth of its wartime forces (coupled with its lend-lease supplies to its Allies) had no precedent in history.

The basic building block and fighting unit of the U.S. ground force was the division. Initially projecting a 92-division force, the U.S. Army eventually fielded 89, of which 87 were employed in combat. Given the enormous problems of expansion and overseas deployment and recognizing that (with a few exceptions) the fighting records of U.S divisions deserve places of honor in military history, one inevitably is led to ponder the question of America's wartime combat leadership. Who were the men who led America's divisions? How did their prewar experience prepare them for command? Why were they selected? This study examines the questions above and draws some conclusions regarding the ages, branches, promotion patterns, assignments, military education, quality of performance, and common characteristics of the men commanding U.S. divisions in World War II.

In order to examine these issues properly, it is first necessary to provide an overview of the data collection and analysis. This overview includes three elements: (1) a brief discussion of the command patterns of the 87 combat divisions; (2) a determination of the overall number of combat division commanders and the criteria for selecting those to be studied; and (3) a discussion of problems in the records search at the U.S. Army Reserve Components Personnel and Administration Center. Following this overview, the results of the records search will be presented.

Overview

As noted above, the U.S. employed 87 divisions in combat. Forty-six of these divisions had one commanding general for the duration of their combat tours. These 46 divisions spent an average of 10.4 months in an overseas combat theater, with a standard deviation in this area of comparison of 5.6 months. Graph 1 depicts the wide variation in time (all the graphs are contained at Appendix 1). The majority of these one-commander divisions spent 10 months or fewer overseas.

The 41 divisions with more than one commanding general during their combat tours averaged 25.6 months overseas. Graph 2 shows that the amount of time these divisions spent overseas varied from 5 to 44 months. Each commander of these divisions spent an average of 9.8 months in command, which compares favorably to the 10.4 months in command for single commander divisions. In some cases, certain individuals commanded more than one division (25 generals commanded two different divisions, and three commanded three different divisions). The primary significance of these figures rests simply on the fact that division commanders in both categories averaged about 10 months in command overseas, but there also existed wide variations in the length of command.

The next problem in this investigation of World War II division commanders is to determine the actual number of division commanders. According to Shelby L. Stanton's Order of Battle U.S. Army World War II and The Army Almanac, General Officers in Command of Armies, Corps and Divisions in Combat World War I, World War II, Korean War, 197 individuals served as division commanders from December 1941 to May 1945, for divisions employed in the European Theater of Operations, or from December 1941 to August 1945 for the Pacific area. Since a study of all 197 is impractical, the list was pared to a smaller sample. One commander, Brigadier General Maxon S. Lough, was captured along with his Philippine division; he was not considered. Twenty-four of these 197 division commanders moved to higher command positions and 20 of those are being examined in a separate Combat Studies Institute corps commanders study, so they, too, have been dropped. Forty-two of the 197 division commanders did not lead a division in combat, and because the focus of this study is on war-fighting division commanders, the 42 men who did not command in combat were not included. These eliminations left a total of 134. Since a study in detail of at least 20 percent of the division commanders was required, 45 officers from this list were selected randomly for a detailed records search. This large number was selected so that if problems developed along the way, it would still be possible to achieve a 20 percent sample.

Significant problems in the records search were encountered at the U.S. Army Reserve Components Personnel and Administration Center. Because of a fire several years ago, there were no records available on eleven officers, nine had almost nothing available, two had some records, and 23 had relatively complete records. This resulted in a total of twenty-five records for detailed study. The

records of these twenty-five form the basis of this report. When generalizations are made about division commanders, those generalizations are based on this records study. The initial list of officers selected for study is at Appendix 2.

Age

The average age of the sample group of commanders in 1940 was 47 years old. By comparison, the average age in 1940 of Regular Army division commanders not taking their commands into combat was 52 years old. The youngest division commander studied was 33; the oldest, 58. On average, these 25 combat division commanders had 25.3 years of service upon assumption of command.

Retirement

Sixteen of the twenty-five commanders retired as major generals, five as lieutenant generals, and four as full generals. Without the war, many of these officers probably would have ended their careers as lieutenant colonels.

Promotion Patterns

Graphs 3 through 10 illustrate the time these officers spent at each rank from second lieutenant to brigadier general. Clearly, these officers experienced widely different promotion patterns. Most of them spent considerable time as majors (average - 9.6 years). Nevertheless, despite the wide variations in time in grade, these officers averaged little over 18 years of service as captains, majors, and lieutenant colonels. The significance of this conclusion is that officers in these ranks have sufficient authority and responsibility to know how the Army as a whole works, yet they most often operate at the level where their duties require them to understand the detailed, mundane tasks of making units function. By and large, officers of these three ranks are concerned with routine unit operations- maintenance, training, logistics, etc.--not with the loftier tasks of strategy, long-range planning, budgets, and the like. In short, spending 18 years in the grades of captain, major, and lieutenant colonel in the prewar Army gave these officers ample opportunity to learn their technical stock-in-trade of running a unit and provided them with a solid background for division command. Naturally, this generalization must be validated through an analysis of the officers' assignment histories.

Assignments

Discussions of time-in-service and time-in-grade only hint at what these officers actually did prior to division command. Graph 11 shows the average overall amount of time spent in each of five assignment categories: time with troops, corps staff and below, MACOM staff, instructor duty, student time. Graphs 12 through 16 break the data down into greater detail by considering each assignment category individually.

Not surprisingly, the most frequent assignment was time with troop units. Thus, the earlier conclusion that these officers had ample opportunity to become experts in unit command is validated.

The value of schooling is supported by graph 16, which shows time spent as a student. All but three officers had at least two years of military schooling; fifteen had from three to seven years of duty as a student. The subject of military education is explored in more detail later in the paper. For now it is fair to say that the heavy emphasis on schooling and instructing contributed heavily to the creation of a common professional base among these officers.

Staff duty contains the largest variances among the individual career patterns, particularly for major command staff assignments. Six officers were never assigned to a staff higher than corps, and fourteen spent less than three years on staffs at the corps level and below. There were, however, not that many major command staff assignments available, and the records indicate that divisions and corps staffs benefited more from the assignment of these officers (78 percent of whom were General Staff Corps) than did the War Department Staff.

The next most frequent assignment was that of instructor. Although one officer was never assigned as an instructor, the majority spent between 49 and 108 months on school faculties and staffs. This finding is especially significant considering the generally low regard with which instructor duty is held by today's officer corps. Apparently, instructor duty also had an important impact on the acquisition of the individual skills needed to command a division. Instructors are subject matter experts. The combination of the theoretical and technical knowledge of the instructor with the practical experience of a troop leader is a powerful one, which obviously was well appreciated by the men selecting division commanders in World War II.

The primary duties of these interwar officers were as leaders, teachers, and students. For the most part, they were not hidden away on high-level staffs. They were either learning teaching, or practicing their profession. These officers were involved in the formulation and practice of U.S. military doctrine; thus, as future division commanders they experienced a similar pattern of officer professional development.

The interwar officer also gained experience in overseas assignments. Seventy-two percent had overseas tours before World War II. Twenty-four percent served both in Mexico and the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) in World War I. An additional 28 percent served only in the World War I AEF. Another 20 percent had other overseas tours. The Philippines was the most common interwar overseas assignment but not the only one. A few officers gained diplomatic experience by participating on presidential commissions in Latin America and Europe.

The interwar officers' assignment pattern of rotation between line, staff, and school and periodic rotation overseas is similar to the current assignment pattern. By and large, these officers had typical careers. In the 1920s and 1930s, there was nothing in these officers' records to indicate that they were singled out for special consideration, with the exception of the 36 percent who attended the two-year course at the Command and General Staff School, and that program may have helped future corps commanders more than division commanders.

It is useful, at this point, to look further at the military education of those division commanders.

Military Education

On the average, World War II division commanders came into the Army in 1915, with 1904 as the earliest date, 1929 as the latest, and 1917 as the most frequent commissioning year. Fifty-two percent were graduates of the United States Military Academy. Twenty-four percent had college degrees from other institutions, and an equal percent held no college degree. All these officers eventually became members of the combat arms: 44 percent infantry, 28 percent field artillery, and 28 percent cavalry. Twenty-eight percent of the total officers studied had no formal basic branch training; an additional 12 percent had no advanced branch training, and 16 percent of these two groups had neither basic or advanced branch training. For the most part, these men were cavalry officers who received basic

training in units, or they were officers caught up in the World War I rush and did not have the opportunity for formal basic branch training. Amidst all these career variables, one finds a common element in these officers' education: all were graduates of the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. In addition, nine of the twenty-five attended the two-year CGS course. This course provided all the officers with basic techniques and procedures, and in a real sense, the officers shared a common military theoretical foundation. Furthermore, 76 percent were Army War College graduates and 78 percent were selected for the General Staff Corps.

These last three selections, for the Command and General Staff School, the Army War College, and the General Staff Corps, were interwar indicators of high individual potential for future service at high levels of command. These criteria appear to have been important discriminators in selection for division command.

On the other hand, hundreds of other officers also received the higher military education of Leavenworth and the War College, yet did not serve as division commanders. One must look deeper still at the performance of these 25 division commanders for clues to their selection and preparation for command.

Duty Performance

Evaluation of officer efficiency reports shows that these officers began their careers as decidedly average officers. Their early efficiency reports, with one or two exceptions, reflect competent young officers of rather ordinary ability. To be sure, there are some superior comments contained in the efficiency reports: "One of the most efficient young officers I know," and "This officer would have been rated higher but for age and experience." The general pattern of efficiency reports describes slowly developing officers gaining competence with more experience. So as senior lieutenants and captains they received "above average" to "excellent" reports. By the mid-1930s, however, all of these officers continuously received "superiors," the highest rating possible.

Even though they were all molded by the same school system, they were not all the same personality type. The following chart (1) contains descriptive terms taken from their efficiency reports.

CHART 1

Loyal, Dependable

Forceful.	Hardworking.
Energetic.	Diligent.
Active.	Tries to improve himself.
Bold.	Tenacious.
Zealous.	Determined fighter.
Agressive.	Willing.
	Studious.
Opinionated.	Even tempered.
Headstrong.	Good disposition.
Impetuous.	Pleasing personality.
Firmly set in his opinions.	Not a strong personality.
	A steady plugging type.
High strung.	Cooperative.
Highly - nervous temperment.	Agreeable.
Blusterous.	Solid rather than
Contentious.	Enthusiastic.
Intelligent.	Not stupid, but careless and inaccurate.
Bright.	Very faithful but uninspired.
Accurate.	Thinks clearly but slowly.
	Not brilliant.
Sense of humor.	Sulks.
Cheerful.	
Imaginative.	Lacks imagination.
One of the most efficient young officers.	Inclined to await orders to perform the routine drudgery rather than look for work to do.

For almost every trait listed on chart 1, there can also be found a counterbalancing trait. Yet, all the officers were eventually selected as division commanders. This simply means there is no such thing as a standard personality trait for a successful leader. Their hobbies were also varied but dealt, for the most part, with outdoor activities, with horseback riding and golf leading the list. Reflecting the times probably more than anything else, 100 percent were married.

But were these officers successful combat commanders? None were relieved for cause. Some were sent home for health reasons. One received an unsatisfactory efficiency report during combat but was not relieved of command. His next report was good and indicated remarkable improvement. Additionally, a few were found to be better in training than in combat, while others were stated to be average combat soldiers but would be above average staff officers.

Interestingly, twenty-three of the twenty-five division commanders held command positions shortly before becoming division commanders: ten were assistant division commanders, three were division artillery commanders, four were combat command commanders, four were brigade commanders, and one was a regimental commander. Only two officers were assigned to division command from staff assignments.

It appears that assignment as an assistant division commander before commanding a division was the desired practice of the War Department. In an interview conducted by Dr. John Partin, Combat Studies Institute, on 25 October 1984, former World War II division commander and later Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, General Charles L. Bolte, related that General Lesley McNair said that he was in line for a division, but that he had to be an assistant division commander first. General Bolte further stated that he was sure there was some type of board held to select division commanders, but he did not know the process or the criteria for selection.

If, indeed, it was planned for an officer to be an assistant division commander before commanding a division, then what was his second previous assignment? Nearly 50 percent of the officers were commanding troops, 21 percent were chiefs of staff at post, corps, or division levels, and the remainder were spread out on staffs from the War Department through the Army Ground Forces, from Army to division level. Over 70 percent, then, were in the field. These officers for the most part were not senior executives

on staffs or assistants to important men who could provide connections for future assignments. Instead, they were proving their ability in the field. In doing so, they displayed the most consistent trait found on nearly all of their records. The word "energetic" is contained in the vast majority of the efficiency reports.

These officers could lack immagination, be solid rather than enthusiastic, but they had to be energetic. Along with energetic, hardworking was often mentioned on performance reports. They were men who did something, be their judgment good or bad. In only one case was an officer not identified as either energetic or hardworking. This leads to a tentative conclusion that to be a division commander it was not a matter of whom one knew but rather a result of hard work, proven ability, and endurance.

Hard work alone, though, was not enough. Luck also may have played a part in their selection for command--luck as to timing and location. They may have happened to be in the right place to command a brigade or in a position to be able to become an assistant commander. But once that happened, they had to prove themselves as being capable according to military doctrine and leadership techniques. Once they proved themselves in training, they were given a division destined for combat.

It has already generally been stated that these were generally successful commanders. A look at the available final World War II ratings for these men is also revealing. These ratings come from such commanders as Omar Bradley, J. Lawton Collins, Walter Krueger, George Patton, and Lucian Truscott. The first number is the officer's position out of a total (second number) of officers of similar grade and responsibility.

3 of 19	12 of 20
25 of 150	7 of 30
39 of 197	4 of 15
60 of 197	35 of 197
32 of 168	27 of 29
50 of 168	16 of 29
54 of 197	58 of 197
3 of 15	8 of 19
	24 of 145

The figures above indicate that these officers were not all superstars, neither the best possible to study nor the worst. They were probably average division commanders, competent to accomplish the missions given to them.

In conclusion, these officers were prepared for division command by varied field and staff assignments, teaching duties, and Army schools. They were among the group that had been selected for the Army War College and General Staff Corps. They had considerable military experience and were most likely to have been lieutenant colonels in 1940. They were selected for division command because they had proven themselves in the field and had an extra quantity of energy and willingness to work hard. Finally, they did the job required in combat. They may not have been shining stars, but they were proficient in military doctrine, held their units together, and defeated the Germans and Japanese in armed combat.

APPENDIX 1 GRAPHS

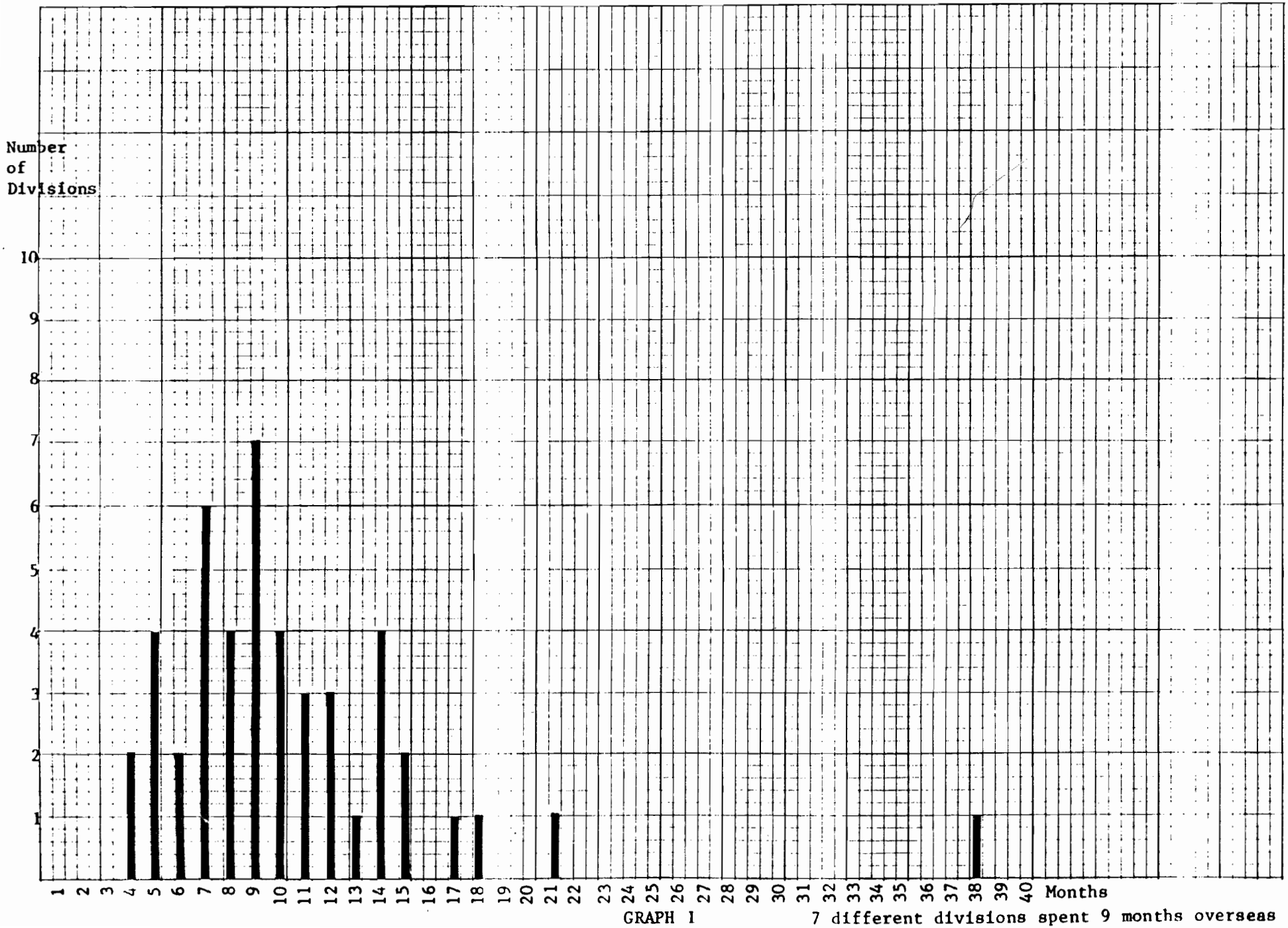
1. Months overseas, divisions with one commander.
2. Months overseas, divisions with two or more commanders.
3. Average time in grade (prior to division command).
4. Time in grade as second lieutenant.
5. Time in grade as first lieutenant.
6. Time in grade as captain.
7. Time in grade as major.
8. Time in grade as lieutenant colonel
9. Time in grade as colonel.
10. Time in grade as brigadier general.
11. Average time in duty assignments.
12. Assignment with troops.
13. Assignment on staffs to corps level.
14. Assignment on MACOM staffs.
15. Assignment as an instructor.
16. Assignment as a student.

APPENDIX 2 LIST OF OFFICERS STUDIED

Terry de la Mesa Allen
Edward M. Almond
Clift Andrus
A. V, Arnold
Paul W. Baade
Raymond O. Barton
Harold W. Blakeley
Alexander R. Bolling
Charles L. Bolte
Withers H. Burress
C. H. Corlett
Norman D. Cota
John B. Coulter
Louis A. Craig
John E. Dahlquist
Robert T. Frederick
James M. Gavin
Charles H. Gerhardt
William H. Gill
George W. Griner, Jr.
Robert W. Grow
George P. Hays
Leland S. Hobbs
Stafford L. Irwin
Walter E. Lauer
Robert C. Macon
Harry J. Malony
William M. Miley
William H. H. Morris, Jr.
Verne D. Mudge
Chbarles L. Mullins
John W. O'Daniel
Walter M. Robertson
Maurice Rose
Charles W. Ryder
Albert C. Smith
Donald A. Stroh
Innis P. Swift
Joseph M. Swing
Maxwell D. Taylor
Harry L. Twaddle
Orlando Ward
Issac D. White
John S. Wood
Ira T. Wyche

KEUFFEL & ESSER CO.
PRINTED IN U.S.A.
10 X 10 TO 1 INCH
5TH LINE ACCENTED, 10TH HEA

MONTHS OVERSEAS, DIVISIONS WITH ONE COMMANDER

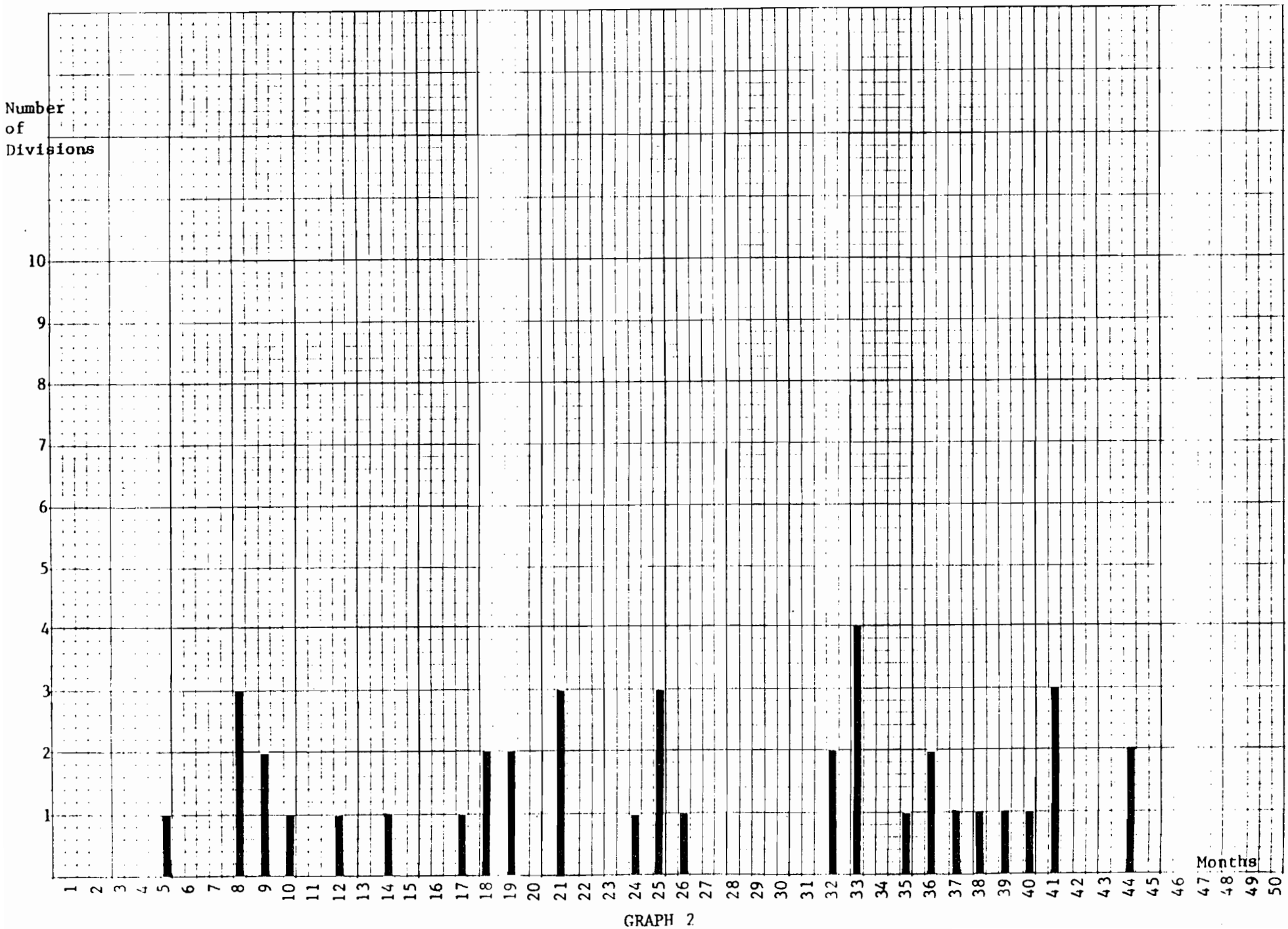


GRAPH I

7 different divisions spent 9 months overseas

FROM 10 X 10 TO 1 INCH
5TH LINE ACCENTED. 10TH HEA

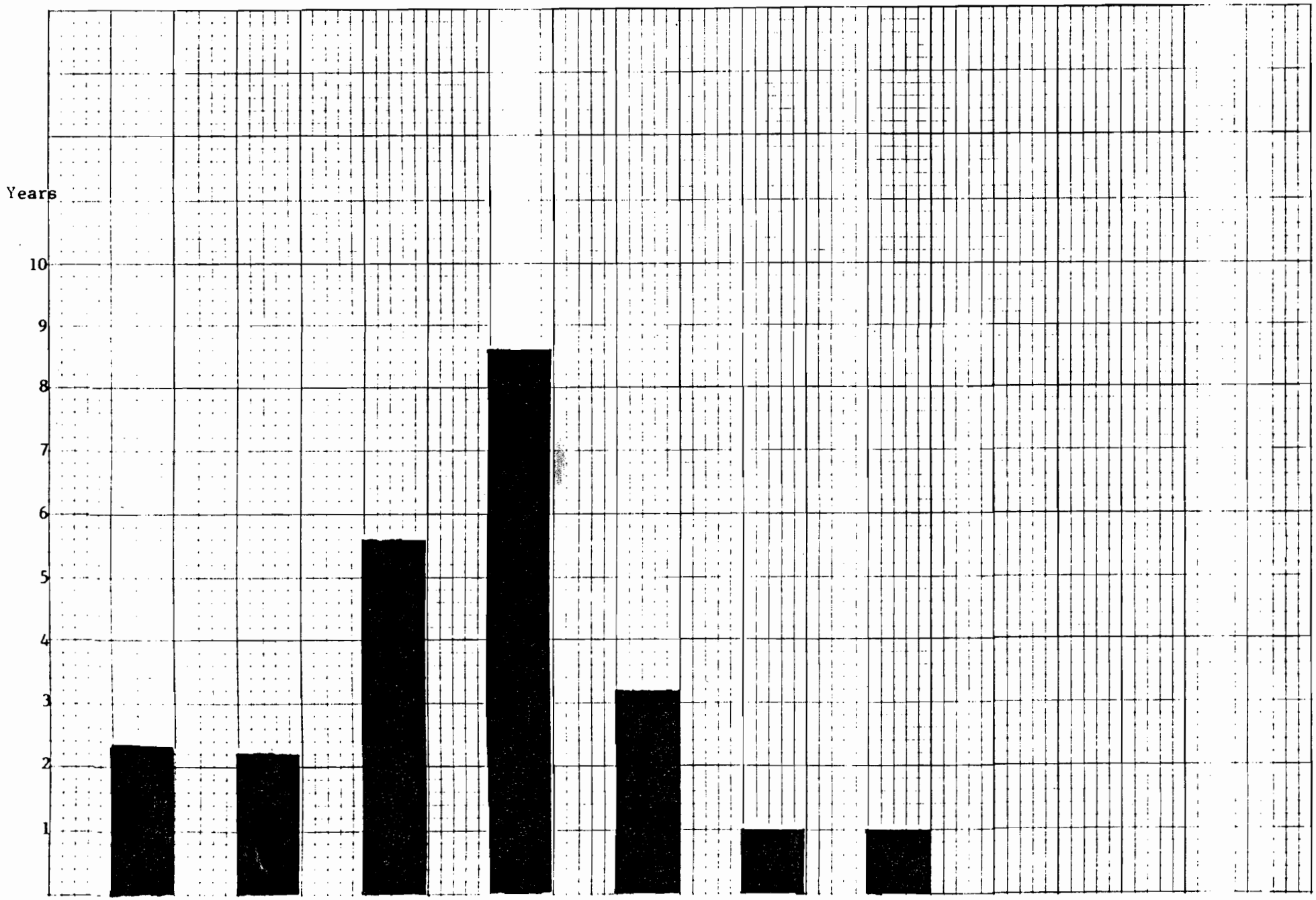
MONTHS OVERSEAS, DIVISIONS WITH TWO OR MORE COMMANDERS



GRAPH 2

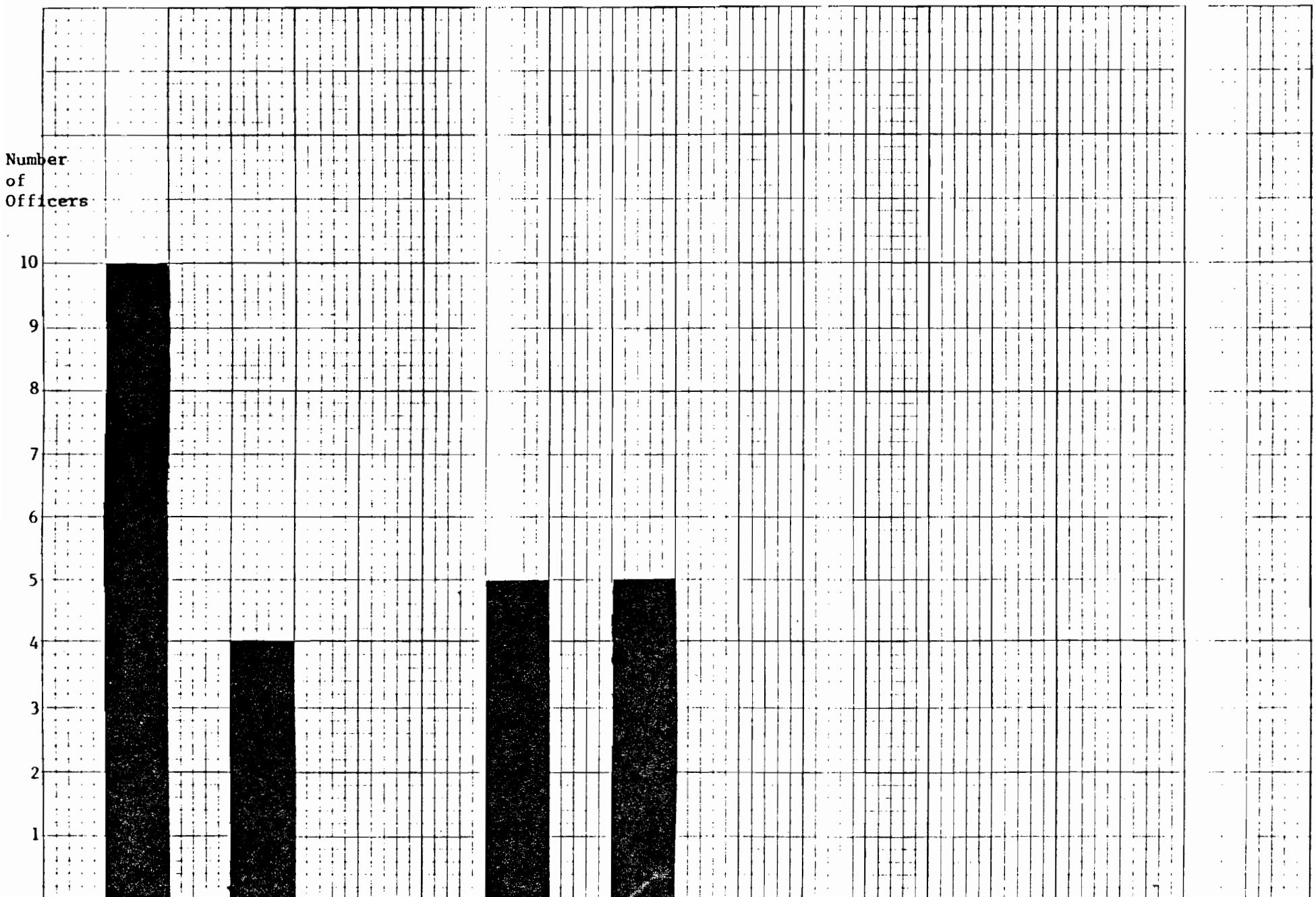
EPSILON 10 X 10 TO 1 INCH
5TH LINE ACCENTED, 10TH HEA

AVERAGE TIME IN GRADE (PRIOR TO DIVISION COMMAND)



GRAPH 3

TIME IN GRADE AS 2LT

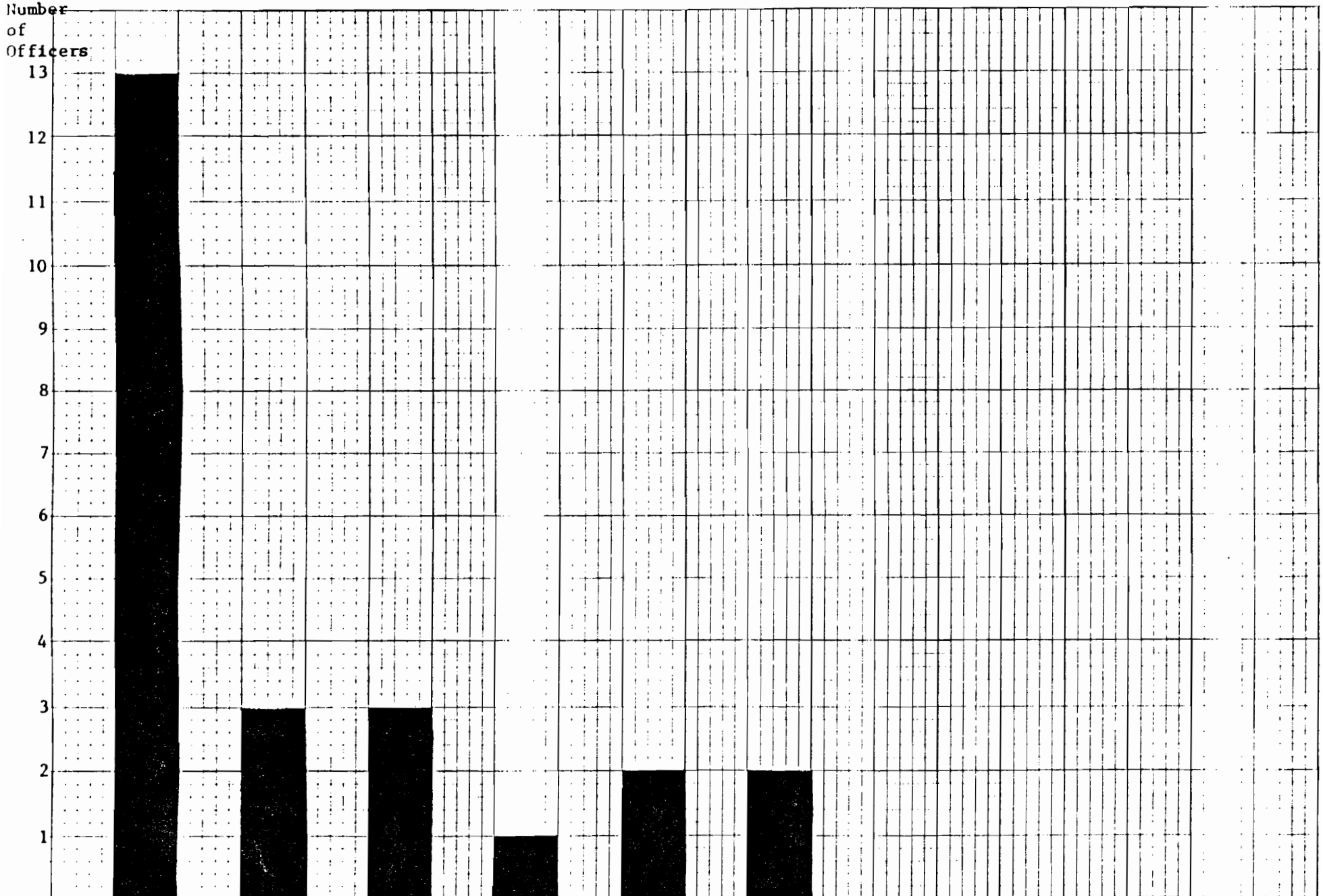


10 Officers were promoted to 1LT during their first year of service

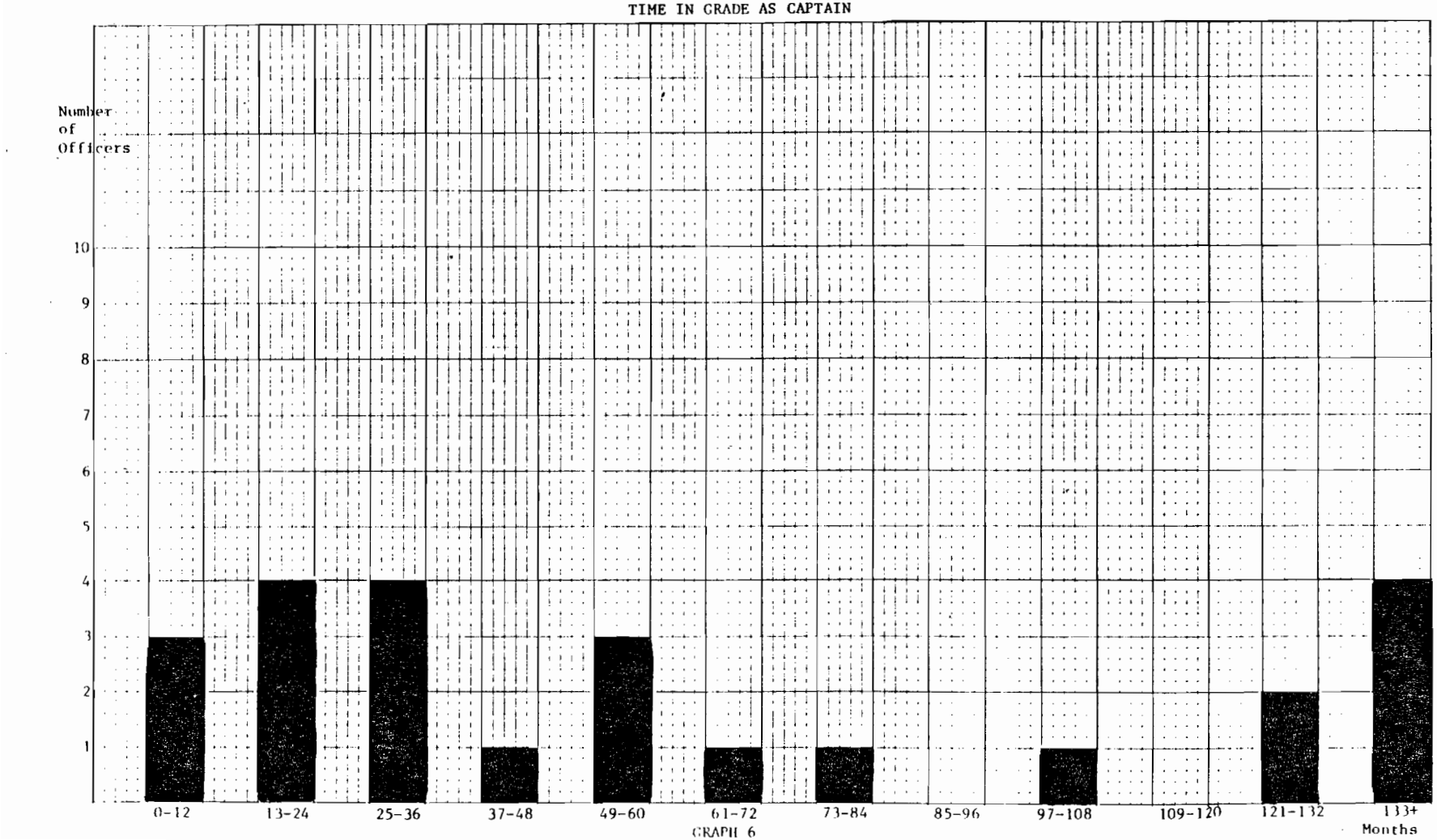
Data on graphs 4 through 10
Base on 24 records

GRAPH 4

TIME IN GRADE AS 1LT



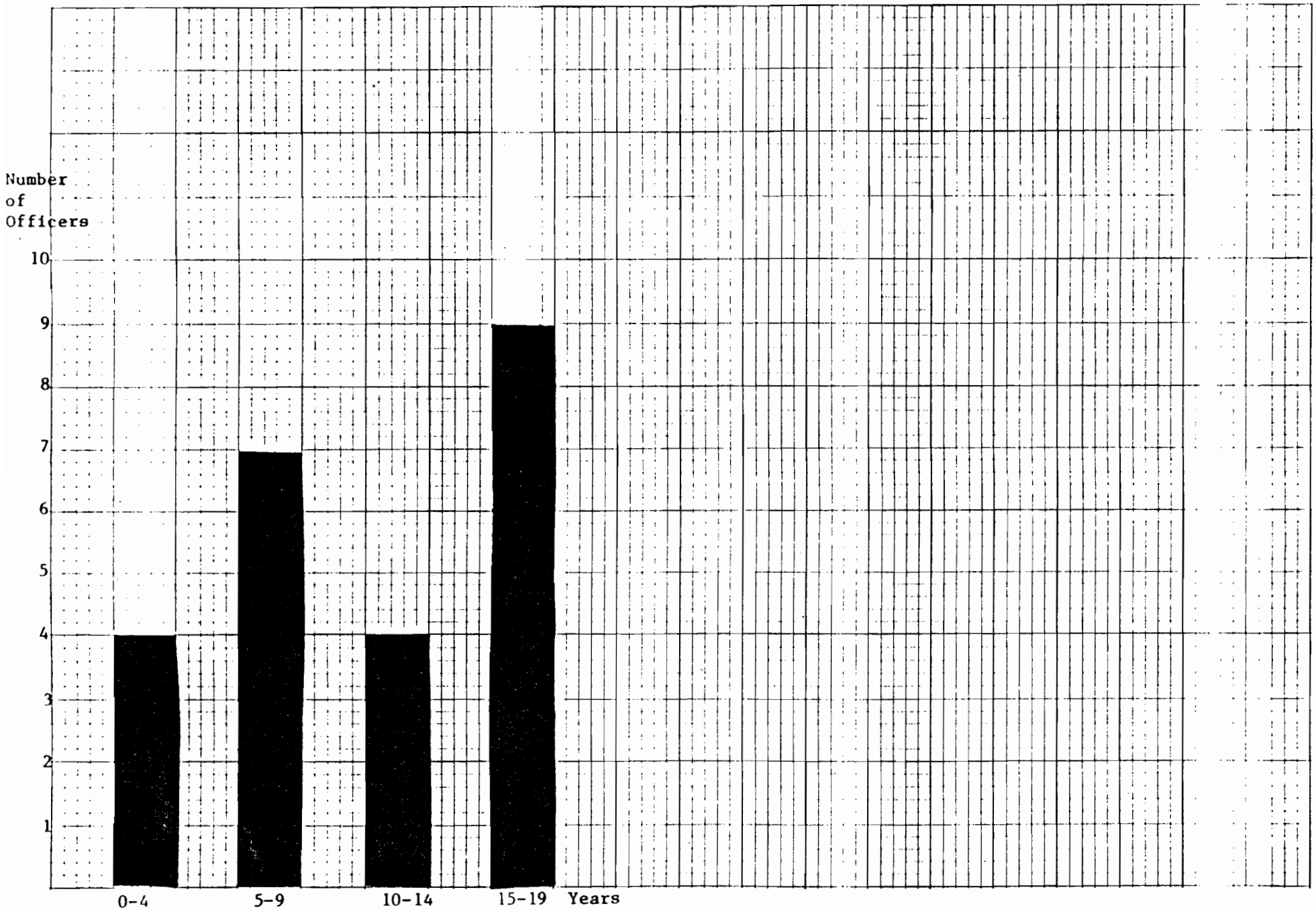
GRAPH 5


TIME IN GRADE AS CAPTAIN
Number of Officers
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0-12
13-24
25-36
37-48
49-60
61-72
73-84
85-96
97-108
109-120
121-132
133+
Months

GRAPH 6

FOLLOW 10 X 10 TO 1 INCH
5TH LINE ACCENTED 10TH REP

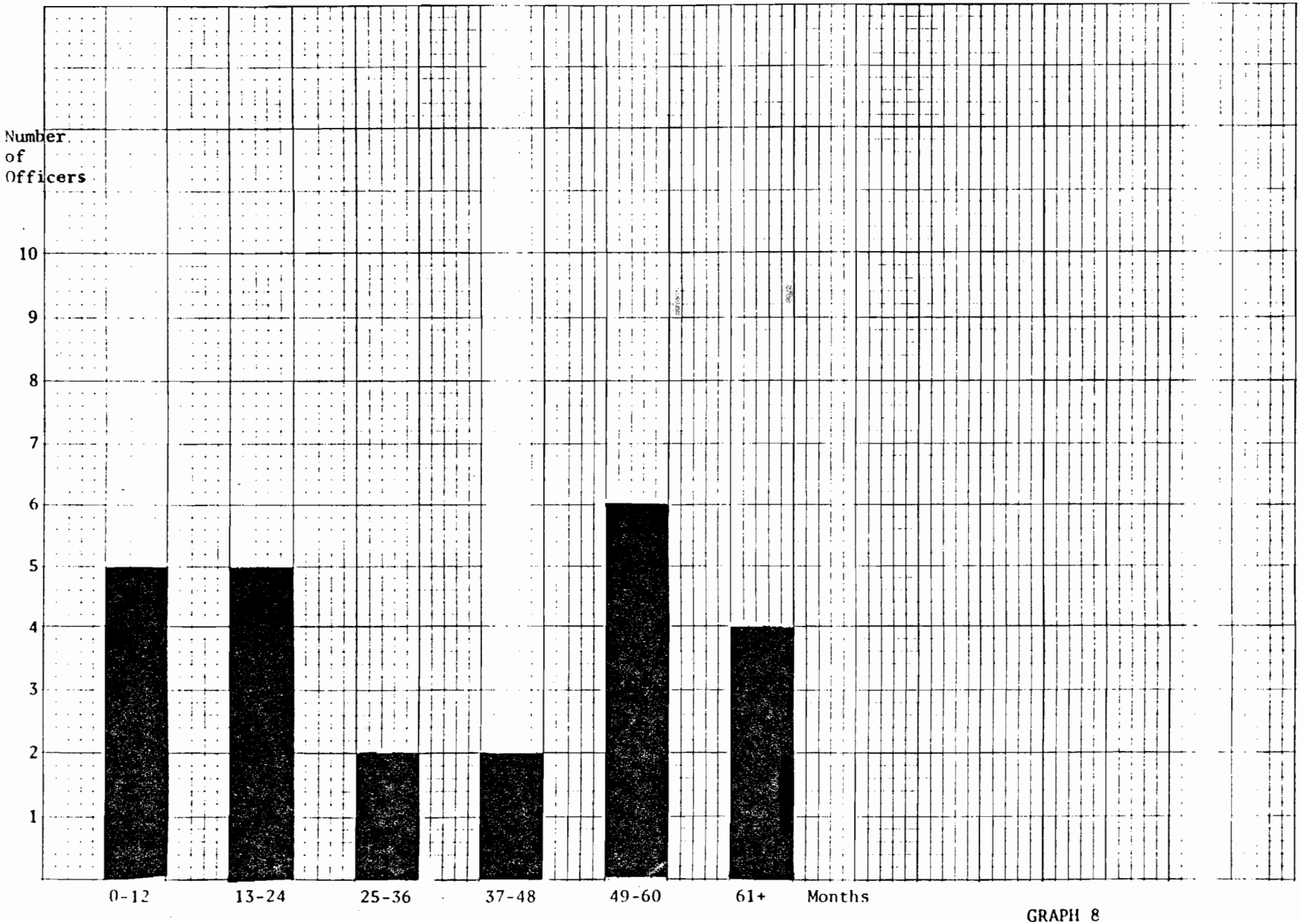
TIME IN GRADE AS MAJOR



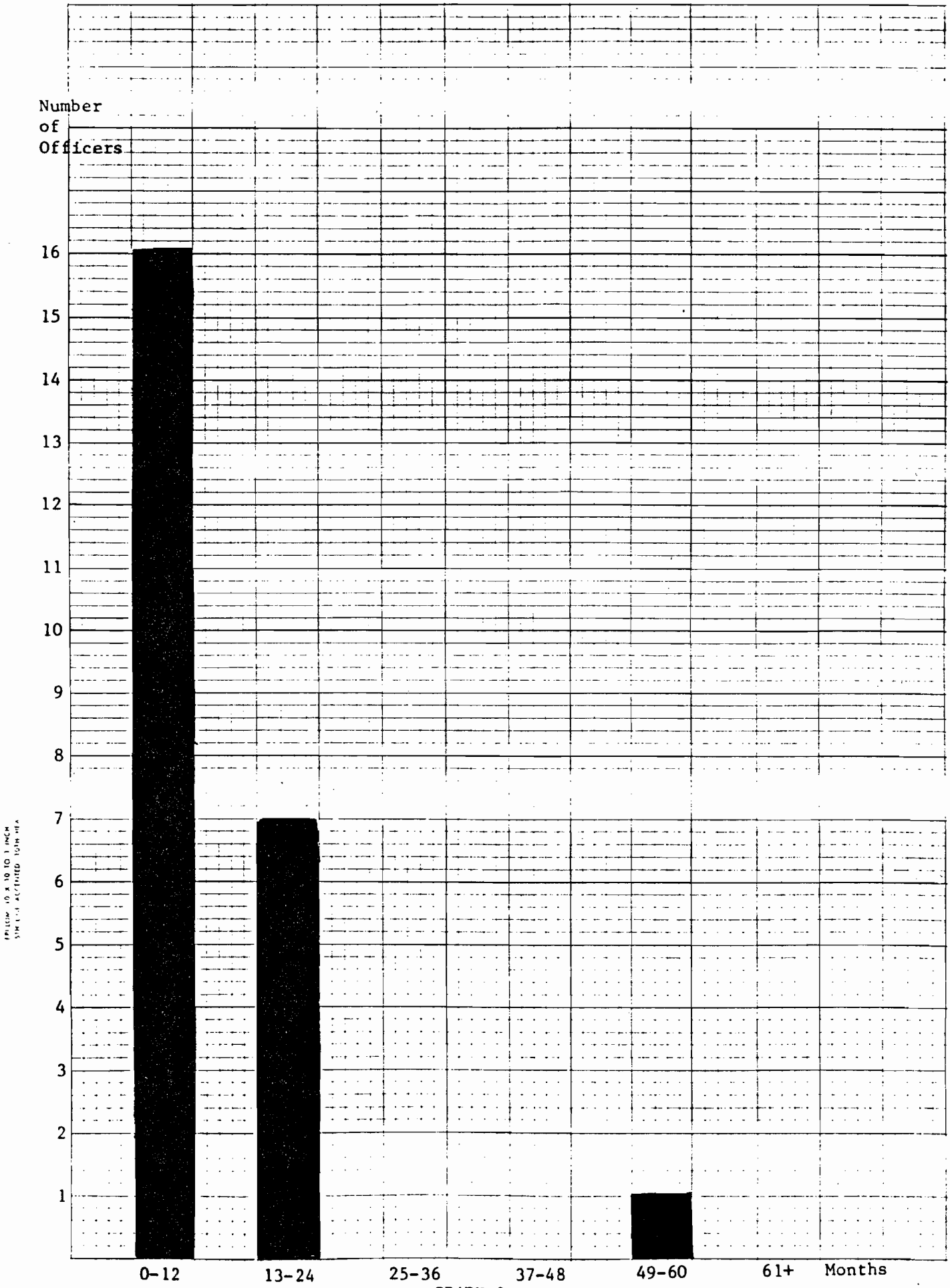
GRAPH 7

EPSILON 10 X 10 TO 1 INCH
5TH LINE ACCENTED, 10TH HEAVY

TIME IN GRADE AS LTC

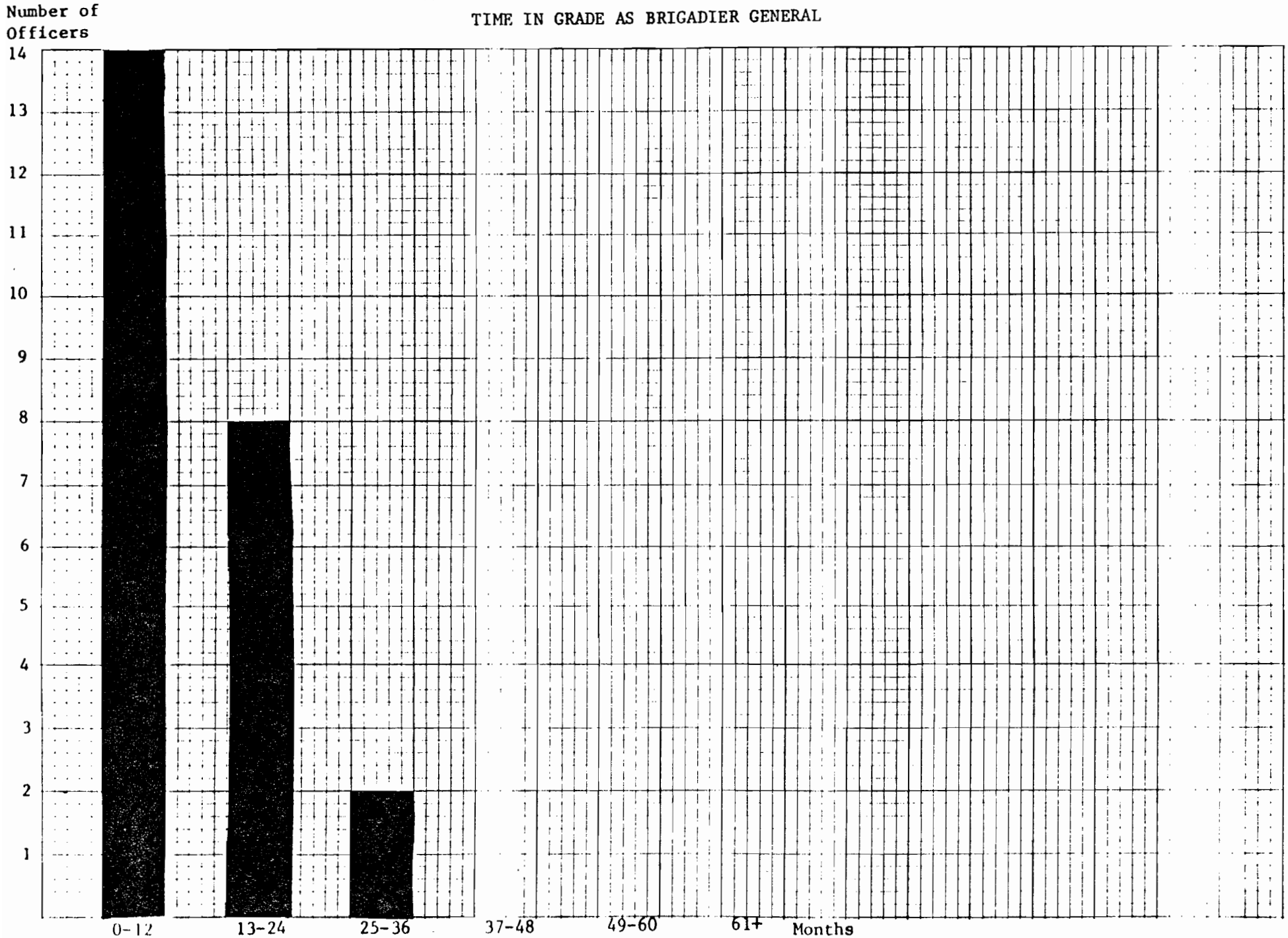


GRAPH 8


Number of Officers
16
15
14
13
12
11
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0-12
13-24
25-36
37-48
49-60
61+
Months

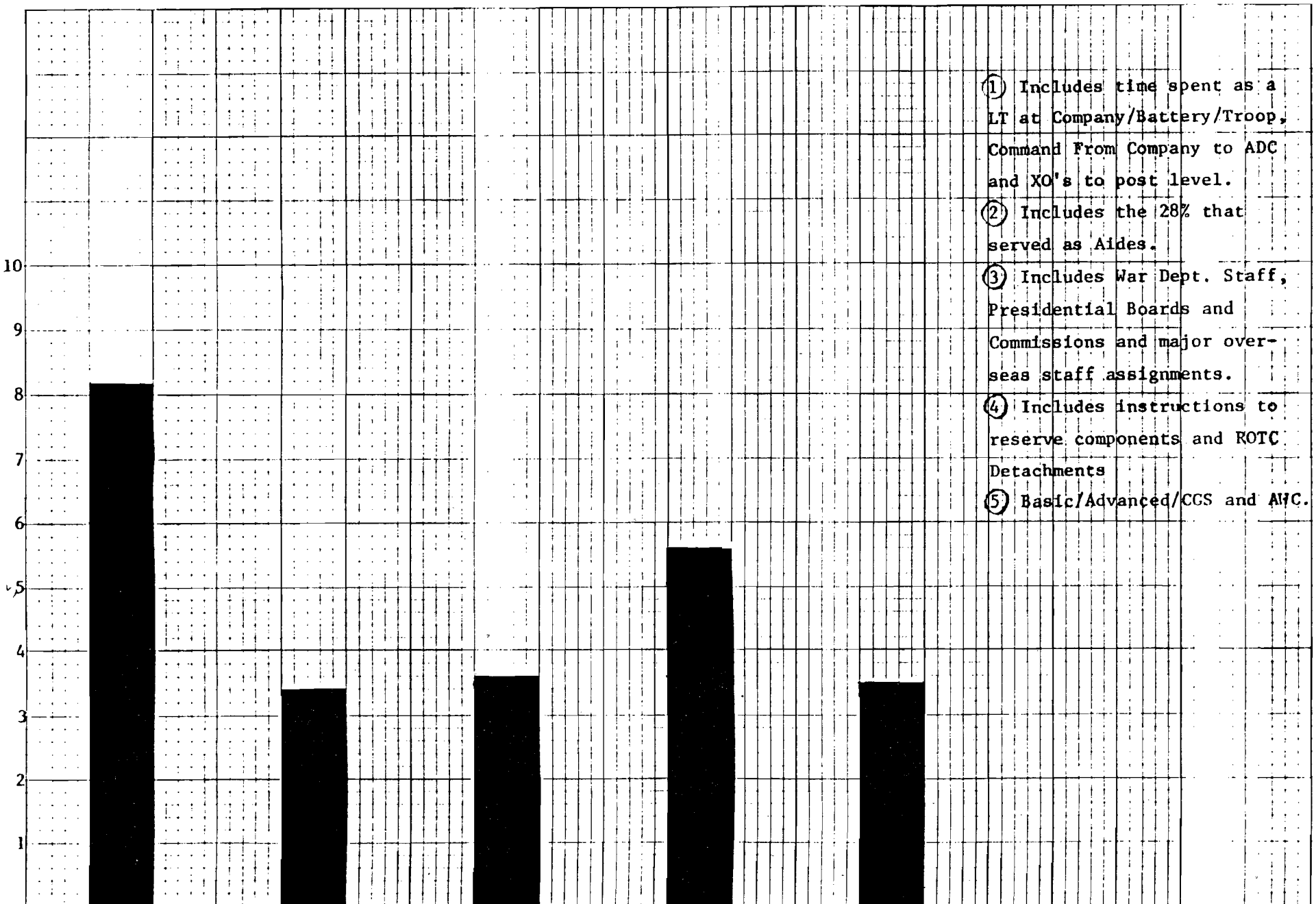
GRAPH 9

EPLEGM - 10 X 10 TO 1 INCH
5TH LINE ACCENTED, 10TH HEA



GRAPH 10

AVERAGE TIME IN DUTY ASSIGNMENTS



(1) Includes time spent as a LT at Company/Battery/Troop, Command From Company to ADC and XO's to post level.

(2) Includes the 28% that served as Aides.

(3) Includes War Dept. Staff, Presidential Boards and Commissions and major overseas staff assignments.

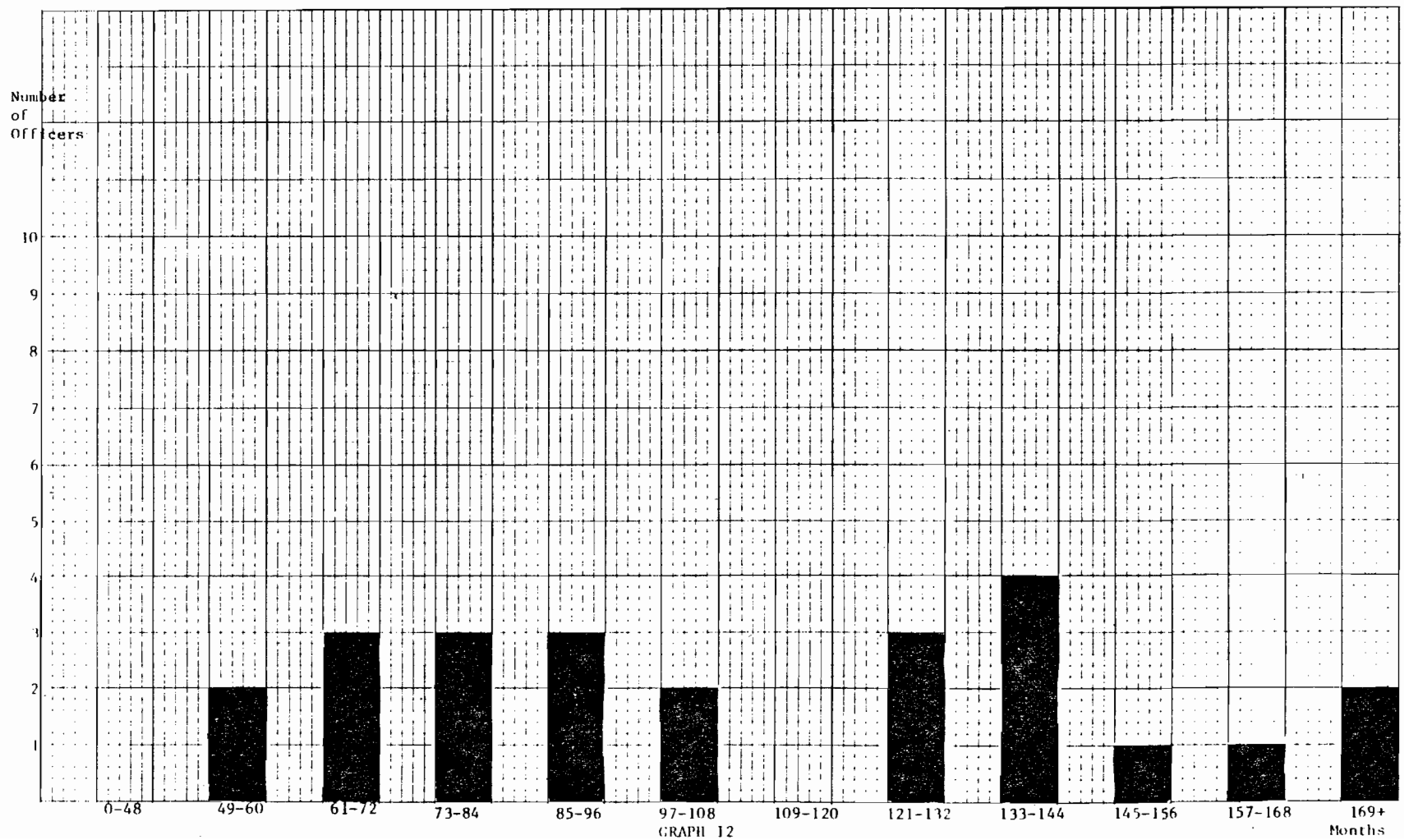
(4) Includes instructions to reserve components and ROTC Detachments

(5) Basic/Advanced/CGS and AWC.

GRAPH 11

FROM 10 X 10 TO 1 INCH
5TH LINE ACCENTED 10TH HEAVY

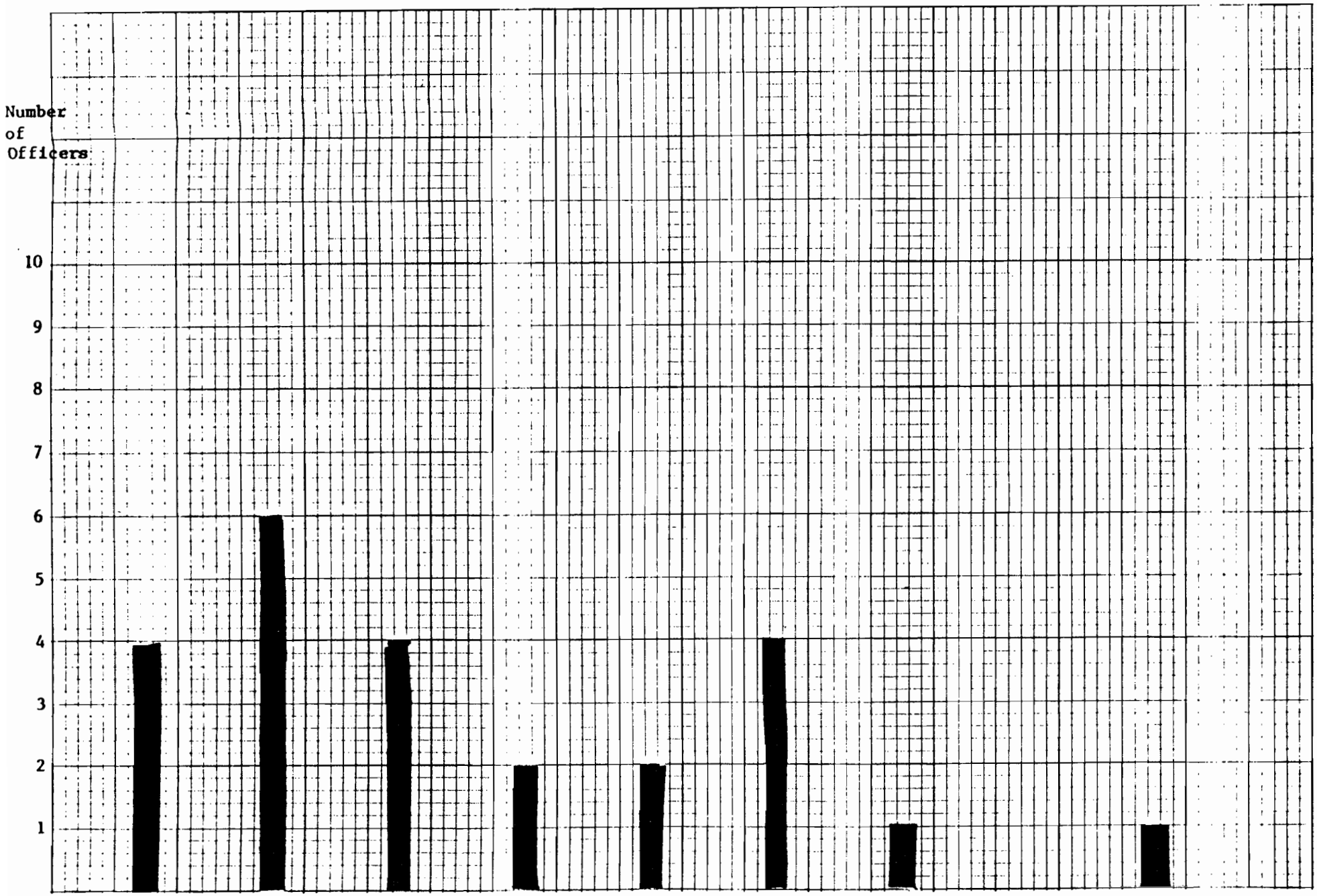
ASSIGNMENT WITH TROOPS



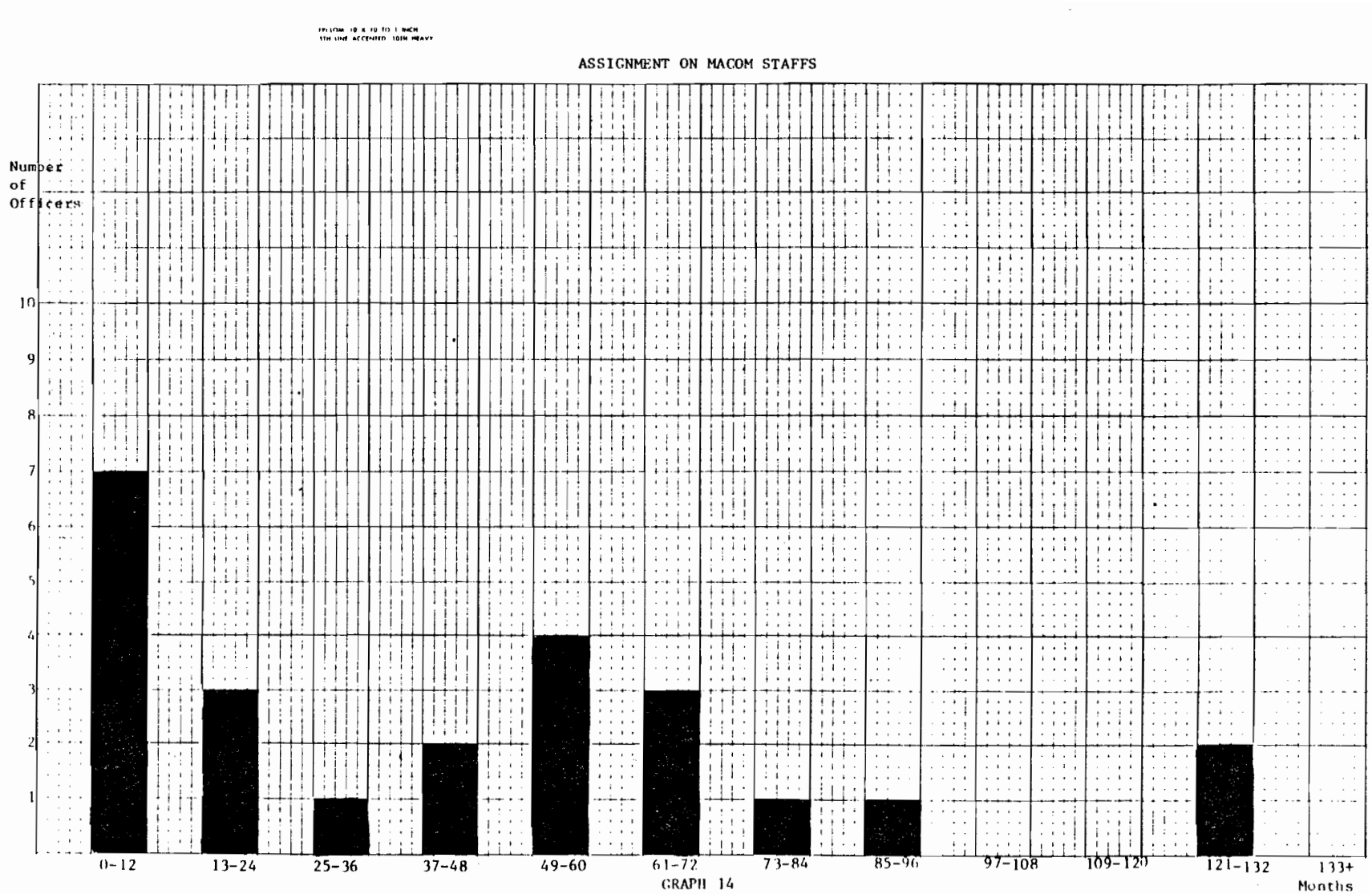
GRAPH 12

EPILOM- 10 X 10 TO 1 INCH
5TH LINE ACCENTED, 10TH MEA-T

ASSIGNMENTS ON STAFFS TO CORPS LEVEL



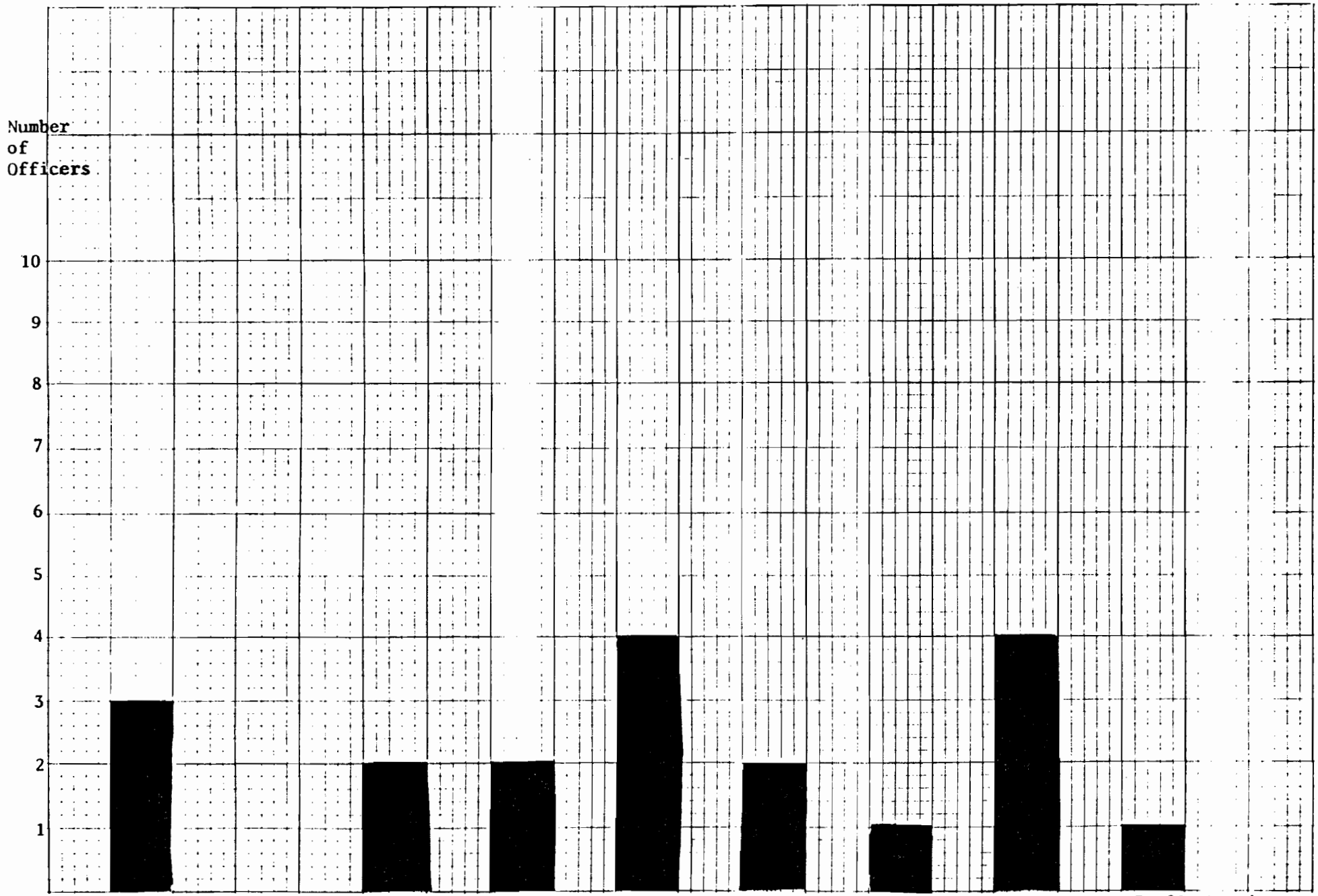
GRAPH 13


ASSIGNMENT ON MACOM STAFFS
Number of Officers
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0-12
13-24
25-36
37-48
49-60
61-72
73-84
85-96
97-108
109-120
121-132
133+
Months

GRAPH 14

KEUFFEL & ESSER CO. MADE IN U.S.A.
5TH LINE ACCENTED, 10TH HEA-

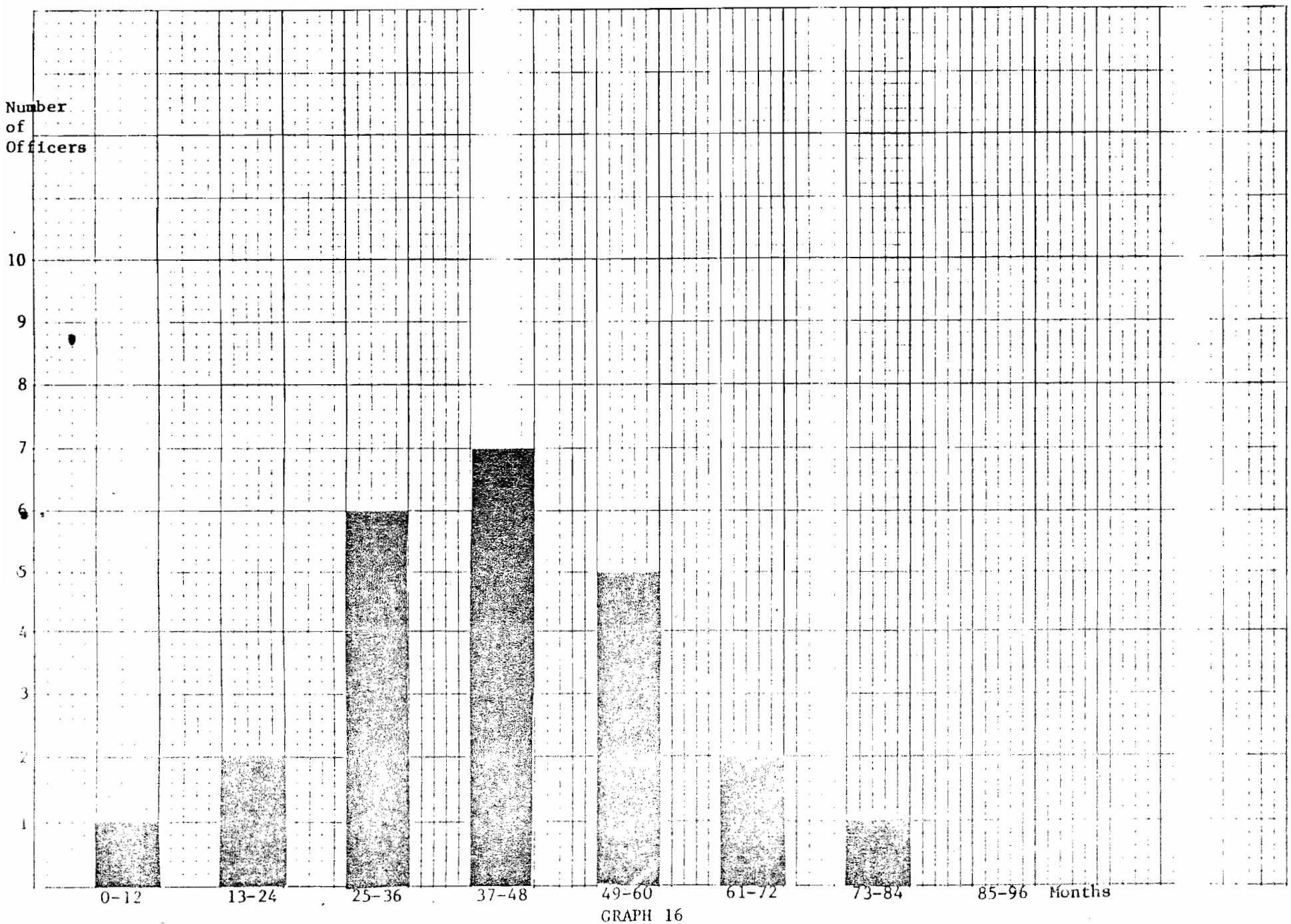
ASSIGNMENT AS AN INSTRUCTOR



GRAPH 15

REDUCED TO A 10 TO 1 INCH
SCALE ACCEPTED, 10TH REA...

ASSIGNMENT AS A STUDENT



GRAPH 16