



NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR AERONAUTICS

TECHNICAL NOTE 4169

ATMOSPHERIC TEMPERATURE OBSERVATIONS TO 100,000 FEET
FOR SEVERAL CLIMATOLOGICAL REGIONS
OF THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE

By H. B. Tolefson

Langley Aeronautical Laboratory
Langley Field, Va.



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SUMMARY

Radiosonde measurements of upper-air temperatures taken over a 5-year period at nine stations in the northern hemisphere are summarized in order to provide information on the temperatures likely to be encountered during airplane and missile operations up to 100,000 feet. The results are in general agreement with those from previous investigations of upper-air temperatures and indicate that the mean temperatures from the tropopause to 100,000 feet tend to increase fairly regularly and rapidly for southern locations, whereas a smaller increase occurs for more northerly locations. The scatter in the temperatures about the mean generally decreased with increasing altitude from the tropopause to 100,000 feet. Little, if any, effect of location upon the temperature was apparent for altitudes above about 90,000 feet.

INTRODUCTION

Data on the atmospheric temperatures at different altitudes have a number of applications during both the design phases and the actual operations of high-speed airplanes and missiles. Measurements of the upper-air temperatures were summarized some time ago by the United States Weather Bureau in reference 1 in order to provide information on the frequency with which given temperatures might be expected at different altitudes and locations. These data covered radiosonde observations made over a 5-year period from locations within the continental United States and in adjoining areas and, because of limitations of the sounding equipment, were restricted to altitudes of about 50,000 feet.

With the more recent design of airplanes and missiles having much greater altitude and range capabilities, temperature data are now needed for higher altitudes and for other areas throughout the world. A summary of radiosonde temperature measurements was accordingly undertaken

by the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics to extend the results in reference 1 to altitudes of about 100,000 feet and to several locations in the northern hemisphere. Although both the altitude and the area coverage of the results represented by this study are still limited, an effort was made through choice of station locations to obtain temperature data which could be considered representative of some of the wider climatological or geographical areas of the northern hemisphere.

Acknowledgment is made to the Office of Climatology of the United States Weather Bureau for their assistance in selecting the upper-air stations most suitable for the present study and to the National Weather Records Center for their services in processing the original observational data.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Scope

Compilation of the available atmospheric temperature and pressure measurements to an altitude of 100,000 feet for a large portion of the earth would be a task of great magnitude. The compilation for continental United States, given in reference 1, and that for the North American continent, given in reference 2, suggest that the main temperature features, particularly at pressure levels corresponding to high altitudes, can be disclosed with significantly smaller effort by considering data for a few radiosonde stations selected to represent several broad climatological regions and geographic locations. Further, a survey of the available radiosonde data indicated that temperature and pressure measurements up to an altitude of about 100,000 feet and extending over a time interval of several years exist only for locations in the northern hemisphere. In view of these considerations, nine widely dispersed radiosonde stations in the northern hemisphere were selected to represent predominantly arctic, semitropical, maritime, and continental influences. Radiosonde observations covering a 5-year period were used for each station. The stations selected, their climatological regions, the time period covered by the observations, and the total number of radiosonde soundings from each station are listed in the following table:

Station	Influences represented	Period of observation	No. of soundings
Thule, Greenland	Arctic	Jan. 1951 - Dec. 1955	1,785
Barrow, Alaska	Arctic	Jan. 1951 - Dec. 1955	1,816
San Juan, P. R.	Semitropical	Jan. 1951 - Dec. 1955	1,823
Ocean station vessel Echo (lat. 35° N., long. 48° W.)	Maritime	Jan. 1951 - Dec. 1955	1,751
Ocean station vessel Victor (lat. 34° N., long. 164° E.)	Maritime	Sept. 1951 - Aug. 1956	1,767
International Falls, Minn.	Continental	Jan. 1951 - Dec. 1955	1,793
El Paso, Tex.	Continental	Jan. 1951 - Dec. 1955	1,820
Itazuki (Fukuoka), Japan	Continental	Jan. 1951 - Dec. 1955	1,772
Wiesbaden, Germany	Continental	Jan.-Apr., June-Aug., Oct.-Nov., 1950 Jan., Mar., May, Sept., Dec., 1951 Feb., Apr.-Dec., 1952 Jan. 1953 - Dec. 1955	1,752

The data for the stations in the table were confined to the daily radiosonde observation taken near 2300 e.s.t. (0300 Z). Because of differences in longitude of the stations, some of the data represent nighttime observations while others represent daytime observations. Temperature differences resulting from these differences in local time of the soundings are not considered significant for the higher altitudes which are of particular interest in this study. References 3 and 4, for example, indicate that diurnal temperature variations at the higher altitudes amount only to about 0.5° C. It may also be noted that with the exception of the data for Wiesbaden, Germany, each set of soundings covered about the same continuous 5-year period.

Results

The results are summarized in table I in terms of the frequencies f and the cumulative probability distributions cpd of the temperatures t observed at given altitudes for each of the nine stations. For the different stations, separate distributions are given for each month of the combined 5-years' sample of data and for the total 5-years' sample. The temperature data given in the table were obtained at the standard reporting pressure levels of 850, 700, 500, 300, 200, 100, 50, 30, 20, and 10 millibars. For convenience, these pressure levels are expressed as the corresponding geometric altitudes in the standard aeronautical atmosphere specified in referencés 2 and 5.

Each entry in table I refers to a temperature observation within a class interval of 2° C. A frequency value for a temperature of 10° C, for example, indicates the number of observations between 10° C and 11.9° C, and a frequency value for a temperature of -10° C indicates the number of observations between -10° C and -8.1° C. The cumulative probability distributions indicate the percentage of observations for which the temperatures exceeded the specified values. It was considered that tabular presentation would place the data in the form most suitable for a variety of uses, such as determining seasonal variations at a given location, the mean, or the standard deviation of the temperatures about the mean at different altitudes.

It might be noted from table I that the number of observations obtained decreases rapidly with altitude, particularly for altitudes above 67,500 feet, because of limitations in the performance of balloon sounding equipment. For Wiesbaden, Germany, only three observations were obtained at altitudes above 67,500 feet in January and February because of interrupted weather services during these months over parts of the 5-year period selected for study. For completeness, however, all observations were tabulated, regardless of how few were available. In addition, all singularities noted during the tabulation of the data by the National Weather Records Center were checked against data reported by previous or following soundings.

It might be pointed out that for each altitude table I approximates a graph in which temperature is the ordinate, time is the abscissa, and the curves are formed by lines running through constant values of the cumulative probability distributions. Thus, the variations in the temperature with season, altitude, and location may be readily observed from the table.

DISCUSSION

Table I indicates large monthly and seasonal temperature variations at all altitudes for the northern locations as compared with somewhat smaller variations for the southern locations. A few examples of the extreme variations in the temperature during summer months (June, July, and August) and winter months (December, January, and February) at altitudes above the tropopause are summarized in the following table for stations representing arctic, semitropical, and maritime regions.

Station	Temperature range, °C, at altitude of --					
	67,500 ft		78,500 ft		87,000 ft	
	Summer	Winter	Summer	Winter	Summer	Winter
Thule, Greenland (arctic)	t -40 to -50 Δt 10	t -42 to -82 Δt 40	t -38 to -50 Δt 12	t -44 to -82 Δt 38	t -36 to -48 Δt 12	-----
San Juan, P. R. (semitropical)	t -56 to -64 Δt 8	t -60 to -80 Δt 20	t -44 to -60 Δt 16	t -50 to -70 Δt 20	t -48 to -54 Δt 6	t -46 to -64 Δt 18
Ocean station vessel Victor (maritime)	t -54 to -64 Δt 10	t -52 to -70 Δt 18	t -46 to -58 Δt 12	t -46 to -64 Δt 18	t -44 to -54 Δt 10	t -42 to -60 Δt 18

The primary indications of the preceding summary are the generally colder temperatures and the larger spread in the temperatures at all locations for the winter months than for the summer months. In similar investigations (ref. 6, for example) tendencies have been found for the temperatures at altitudes near 100,000 feet to be somewhat colder for northern locations than for more southerly locations. These latitude effects are not particularly apparent in the foregoing summary or in table I. The relatively few observations at 102,000 feet in the present summary, however, do not permit definite conclusions to be made in regard to such tendencies in the temperatures.

For a better illustration of the variations in temperature at the different altitudes, the mean temperature and the standard deviation of the temperatures about the mean are plotted against altitude in figure 1 for the 5-years' set of observations taken at Barrow, Alaska, ocean station vessel Victor, International Falls, Minnesota, and San Juan, Puerto Rico. The standard deviation σ is a useful measure of the scatter in the data about the mean and indicates the range that includes approximately 68 percent of the observations. The points in figure 1 are plotted slightly above or below the given altitudes for ease in distinguishing the average temperature and the values of σ . The variations in temperature with altitude for the standard atmosphere of references 2 and 5 are also shown by the curve in figure 1 for comparison with the observed data.

The much colder temperatures at tropopause levels and the wide departures from the temperatures for the standard atmosphere are evident for the southern locations from inspection of figure 1. Also, conditions in the stratosphere for the southern locations are characterized by a fairly large increase in the temperatures with altitude, while a small increase occurs for the more northerly locations. The mean temperatures for the high and low latitudes appear to converge at about 90,000 feet. Similar variations in the mean temperature with altitude above the tropopause for different latitudes are discussed in references 6 and 7.

The values of σ in figure 1 point out the very small variations in troposphere temperatures throughout the year for semitropical locations and the much larger variations for high-latitude stations. Above the tropopause, the temperature spreads generally decrease as altitude increases to 102,000 feet. The comparatively small amount of data obtained at the highest levels does not permit complete confidence to be placed in the values of σ at these altitudes, but in general it appears that the scatter in the temperatures about the mean values is represented by a value for σ of 10° C or more at low altitudes and less than 5° C at the higher altitudes.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The preceding summary of the upper-air temperature measurements taken at nine radiosonde stations over a 5-year period provides basic temperature statistics for use in airplane and missile design studies. The stations were selected to represent given geographic or climatological influences, and the expected wide departures in the temperatures from those specified for standard atmospheric conditions were noted. The scatter in the temperatures at different altitudes agrees with the results from other investigations, and in terms of the standard deviations of the temperatures about the mean, frequently exceed 10° C in the troposphere and are less than 5° C for altitudes from the tropopause to 100,000 feet.

Langley Aeronautical Laboratory,
National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics,
Langley Field, Va., August 23, 1957.

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TABLE I. - SUMMARY OF RADIOSONDE MEASUREMENTS OF UPPER-AIR TEMPERATURES - Continued

Alt. ft	t, °C	Jan.		Feb.		March		April		May		June		July		Aug.		Sept.		Oct.		Nov.		Dec.		Total		t, °C	
		f	cpd	f	cpd	f	cpd	f	cpd	f	cpd	f	cpd	f	cpd	f	cpd	f	cpd	f	cpd	f	cpd	f	cpd	f	cpd		
(d) Ocean station vessel Echo - Continued																													
10,000	10 8 6 4 2 0 -2 -4 -6 -8 -10 -12 -14	1	1																								15	1	10
18,000	-6 -8 -10 -12 -14																										34	2	-6
30,000	-32 -34 -36 -38 -40 -42 -44 -46 -48 -50 -52 -54 -56																										7	5	-34
38,500	-46 -48 -50 -52 -54 -56 -58 -60 -62 -64 -66 -68 -70																										5	2	-46
53,000	-56 -58 -60 -62 -64 -66 -68 -70 -72 -74 -76 -78 -82																										6	1	-54
67,500	-50 -52 -54 -56 -58 -60 -62 -64 -66 -68 -70																										1	2	-50

TABLE I.- SUMMARY OF RADIOSONDE MEASUREMENTS OF UPPER-AIR TEMPERATURES - Continued

Alt., ft	t, °C	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total		t, °C
		f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	
(1) Wiesbaden, Germany																
5,000	20							3	2						3	20
	18					1	1	3	4						3	18
	16					5	4	9	6						15	16
	14			1	1	1	1	12	13	11	7				42	14
	12					3	3	19	24	12	21				62	12
	10					6	7	21	28	24	40				119	10
	8	1	1			7	12	10	21	25	46				168	8
	6	1	1			5	16	24	36	39	84				194	6
	4	10	8	5	6	15	27	23	51	21	83				194	4
	2			9	13	17	30	19	41	24	67				181	2
	0	19	21	16	24	18	43	18	54	19	79		14	9	23	0
	-2	20	35	16	36	12	52	15	65	19	92				25	-2
	-4	20	49	24	54	20	67	30	87	9	97				25	-4
	-6	23	65	13	63	17	80	8	93	3	99				25	-6
	-8	24	81	21	79	13	90	8	99	1	100				87	-8
	-10	13	90	16	90	8	96					1	99	7	97	-10
-12	8	96	8	96	5	100					1	100		43	-12	
-14	5	99	2	98								2	100	25	-14	
-16			3	100										7	-16	
-18	1	100												3	-18	
10,000	10							1	1						1	10
	8							2	2						3	8
	6							7	7	5	3				15	6
	4					1	1	11	14	22	16	12	10	2	57	4
	2							1	1	5	3	2	2	2	1	2
	0									32	33	17	22	15	11	0
	-2	4	3	1	1	2	2	4	4	36	47	37	59	30	52	-2
	-4	4	6	7	7	10	12	13	19	24	59	28	78	35	75	-4
	-6	22	21	15	18	11	21	21	35	32	62	14	86	12	97	-6
	-8	14	31	12	27	25	39	20	45	21	76	12	94	3	99	-8
	-10	20	44	14	38	27	60	28	70	11	83	6	99	9	97	-10
	-12	21	59	17	50	14	71	16	82	16	94	2	100	4	99	-12
	-14	23	75	24	68	14	81	13	91	5	97			3	97	-14
	-16	18	88	10	75	6	86	6	96	4	99			1	100	-16
	-18	13	97	16	87	5	89	5	99			5	100	11	95	-18
	-20	3	99	12	96	11	98	1	100					3	99	-20
-22	1	99	5	99	3	100							3	99	-22	
-24	1	100	1	100	3	100							1	100	-24	
18,000	-8							1	1						3	-8
	-10							3	2	1	1				11	-10
	-12							11	12	16	13	1	1		54	-12
	-14					2	2	12	9	16	17	45	46	44	41	-14
	-16							29	39	56	70	22	55	24	47	-16
	-18	1	1	3	2	1	1	3	4	31	63	21	83	29	66	-18
	-20	4	4	1	3	6	6	14	14	29	36	18	76	15	93	-20
	-22	10	11	11	11	11	14	20	29	39	61	13	86	1	94	-22
	-24	25	28	18	25	18	28	23	47	20	74	8	92	7	99	-24
	-26	26	47	17	37	27	49	26	66	19	86	6	97	2	100	-26
	-28	16	58	10	45	24	68	23	84	9	92	1	98	9	99	-28
	-30	20	72	18	58	12	77	10	91	3	94	2	99	2	100	-30
	-32	19	85	16	70	6	82	7	96	5	97	1	100	5	99	-32
	-34	12	94	15	81	10	90	5	100					1	99	-34
	-36	4	97	13	91	4	93					1	100		4	-36
	-38	3	99	8	97	4	96							1	99	-38
-40	2	100	3	99	4	99							1	100	-40	
-42			1	100	1	100								2	-42	
-44													1	100	-44	
30,000	-34							1	1						1	-34
	-36							1	1	1	1				2	-36
	-38							1	1	23	22	17	14	5	3	-38
	-40							2	1	14	15	57	60	31	42	-40
	-42							10	8	28	38	28	78	28	61	-42
	-44	1	1			1	1	10	8	38	49	18	90	29	80	-44
	-46			1	1	1	1	3	3	20	21	38	49	18	90	-46
	-48	5	5	7	7	7	7	12	14	30	41	19	85	9	96	-48
	-50	20	22	17	22	18	21	26	36	55	77	10	93	5	99	-50
	-52	17	36	13	34	34	49	35	65	22	91	8	100	1	100	-52
	-54	27	58	19	50	31	74	26	87	11	99			2	100	-54
	-56	27	81	37	83	20	90	15	100	2	100			9	100	-56
	-58	15	93	13	95	9	98							8	100	-58
	-60	7	99	5	99	2	99							3	98	-60
	-62	1	100	1	100	1	100							3	100	-62

TABLE I. - SUMMARY OF RADIOSONDE MEASUREMENTS OF UPPER-AIR TEMPERATURES - Continued

Alt., ft	t, °C	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total	t, °C
		f cpd %	f cpd %	f cpd %	f cpd %	f cpd %	f cpd %	f cpd %	f cpd %	f cpd %	f cpd %	f cpd %	f cpd %	f cpd %	
(1) Wiesbaden, Germany - Continued															
38,500	-42						1 1		1 1					2	-42
	-44					1 1	2 3		2 2				1 1	2	-44
	-46		2 2			4 4	1 4		7 7		1 2			2	-46
	-48	2 2	3 6			12 12	2 5	19 19	12 15	13 12			1 1	2	-48
	-50	2 4	8 14	1 1	4 4	5 16	13 17	12 28	17 27	7 18	10 10	5 4	4 5	88	-50
	-52	2 7	7 21	13 13	6 10	16 27	17 31	20 42	16 39	8 25	4 13	14 15	4 10	129	-52
	-54	10 18	13 35	15 27	11 21	15 37	16 45	19 56	19 52	9 32	11 22	13 24	15 21	166	-54
	-56	14 33	15 50	18 44	17 37	11 45	15 58	14 66	22 67	19 48	17 34	14 35	13 30	189	-56
	-58	12 47	11 61	7 51	10 47	15 56	14 70	23 82	19 80	16 61	13 44	13 44	13 40	166	-58
	-60	12 60	12 74	11 61	16 63	16 67	9 78	17 94	13 90	26 82	18 58	12 53	16 52	178	-60
	-62	10 71	7 61	14 75	7 70	31 89	19 95	8 100	13 100	16 95	29 79	10 81	20 66	184	-62
	-64	6 78	6 87	9 83	11 80	10 96	6 100			6 100		18 74	16 78	110	-64
	-66	7 86	3 90	9 92	15 95	6 100						17 87	17 90	80	-66
	-68	5 91	8 98	7 98	4 99							14 97	7 96	45	-68
-70	6 98	2 100		1 100							4 99	19 100	19	-70	
-72	2 100		2 100								2 100		4	-72	
53,000	-44								1 1					1	-44
	-46								1 2					1	-46
	-48					3 3	5 5	5 5	8 9	1 1				2	-48
	-50		2 5		2 3	19 21	16 22	20 35	32 39	7 11			1 1	99	-50
	-52	3 8	2 10	2 4	11 17	29 48	26 50	30 65	24 61	6 18	3 4		3 4	139	-52
	-54	3 22	6 25	10 24	15 37	30 76	34 85	21 85	24 83	17 38	5 11		7 12	174	-54
	-56	3 31	10 50	19 62	20 43	20 94	12 98	8 93	12 94	27 68	12 28	5 4	7 20	155	-56
	-58	8 53	6 65	9 80	22 92	5 99	2 100	6 99	4 97	18 89	20 56	18 26	10 31	128	-58
	-60	3 67	6 80	7 94	6 100			1 100	2 99	9 99	17 79	29 60	24 58	106	-60
	-62	6 83	6 95	7 98	1 100				1 100	1 100	11 94	16 78	22 82	84	-62
	-64	4 94	2 100	3 100							2 97	14 94	9 92	34	-64
	-66	2 100									2 100	5 100	3 96	12	-66
	-68													1	-68
	-70													1	-70
-72													2	-72	
-74													1	-74	
67,500	-46					1 1			1 1					2	-46
	-48					1 3	1 1	4 6	1 2					7	-48
	-50				1 2	5 9	10 15	5 14	7 12	1 2				29	-50
	-52				7 17	13 26	28 54	26 55	30 51	3 7				107	-52
	-54				3 23	27 61	26 90	24 92	20 77	13 28	1 2			114	-54
	-56				6 36	18 84	7 100	5 100	13 94	24 68				75	-56
	-58	1 33			12 62	12 100			4 99	16 95	7 20		2 13	54	-58
	-60	1 67	1 6	13 68	10 83	12 100			1 100	3 100	11 46	10 19	5 30	55	-60
	-62	1 100	7 50	4 90	7 98						20 95	6 50	5 28	88	-62
	-64		4 75	2 100	1 100							11 49	3 60	21	-64
	-66		3 94								2 100	15 77	7 83	27	-66
	-68		1 100									9 93	3 93	12	-68
	-70											3 98	2 100	5	-70
	-72													1	-72
78,500	-44					1 2	1 2	1 2	1 2					4	-44
	-46				1 3	1 3	10 18	6 14	1 4					19	-46
	-48				3 8	6 28	14 41	11 23	4 9					34	-48
	-50				10 24	22 65	18 77	19 56	8 27				1 7	74	-50
	-52				2 10	28 68	17 93	12 100	13 83					82	-52
	-54				5 28	9 83	4 100		8 97	13 54			1 13	40	-54
	-56				6 48	10 98			2 100	11 80	4 17			33	-56
	-58			4 57	7 72	1 100				8 98	6 44		1 20	27	-58
	-60			2 86	8 100					1 100	9 83	2 9	1 27	23	-60
	-62	1 100	2 100								3 96	3 23	3 47	12	-62
	-64			1 100							1 100	5 46	3 67	10	-64
	-66											9 86	1 73	10	-66
	-68											2 96	2 87	4	-68
	-70												1 93	1	-70
-72												1 100	2	-72	
87,000	-38					1 2	1 3	2 7						2	-38
	-40					1 2	1 6							4	-40
	-42					4 12	2 13							6	-42
	-44					1 5	10 35	4 25	3 17					18	-44
	-46				1 9	9 27	8 54	11 59	7 40					36	-46
	-48					9 49	14 86	12 97	13 83					49	-48
	-50					12 78	3 93		4 97					26	-50
	-52				2 27	6 93	3 100	1 100	1 100			1 17		23	-52
	-54				2 46	3 100					4 72			9	-54
	-56				1 55						6 93			9	-56
	-58				2 73						2 100		4 83	8	-58
	-60				2 91									2	-60
	-62				1 100							1 100	2 29	1	-62
	-64												4 86	4	-64
-66											1 100	1 80	2	-66	
-72												1 100	1	-72	

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TABLE I. - SUMMARY OF RADIOSONDE MEASUREMENTS OF UPPER-AIR TEMPERATURES - Concluded

Alt., ft.	t, °C	Jan.		Feb.		March		April		May		June		July		Aug.		Sept.		Oct.		Nov.		Dec.		Total		t, °C
		f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	f	cpd %	
(f) Wiesbaden, Germany - Concluded																												
102,000	-24									1	13			1	13											1	3	-24
	-34									1	25	1	20	1	21	1	20									1	6	-34
	-36											1	40	1	38	1	40									4	18	-36
	-38											1	38	1	40	1	40									3	27	-38
	-40									1	30	1	60	3	75											4	38	-40
	-42									1	30	1	80	2	100	1	60									5	53	-42
	-44							1	33	1	88	1	80			2	100									7	74	-44
	-46									1	100							1	20							2	79	-46
	-48											1	100					1	40							2	85	-48
	-50																	2	80							2	91	-50
	-52																	1	100							1	94	-52
	-54							2	100																	2	100	-54

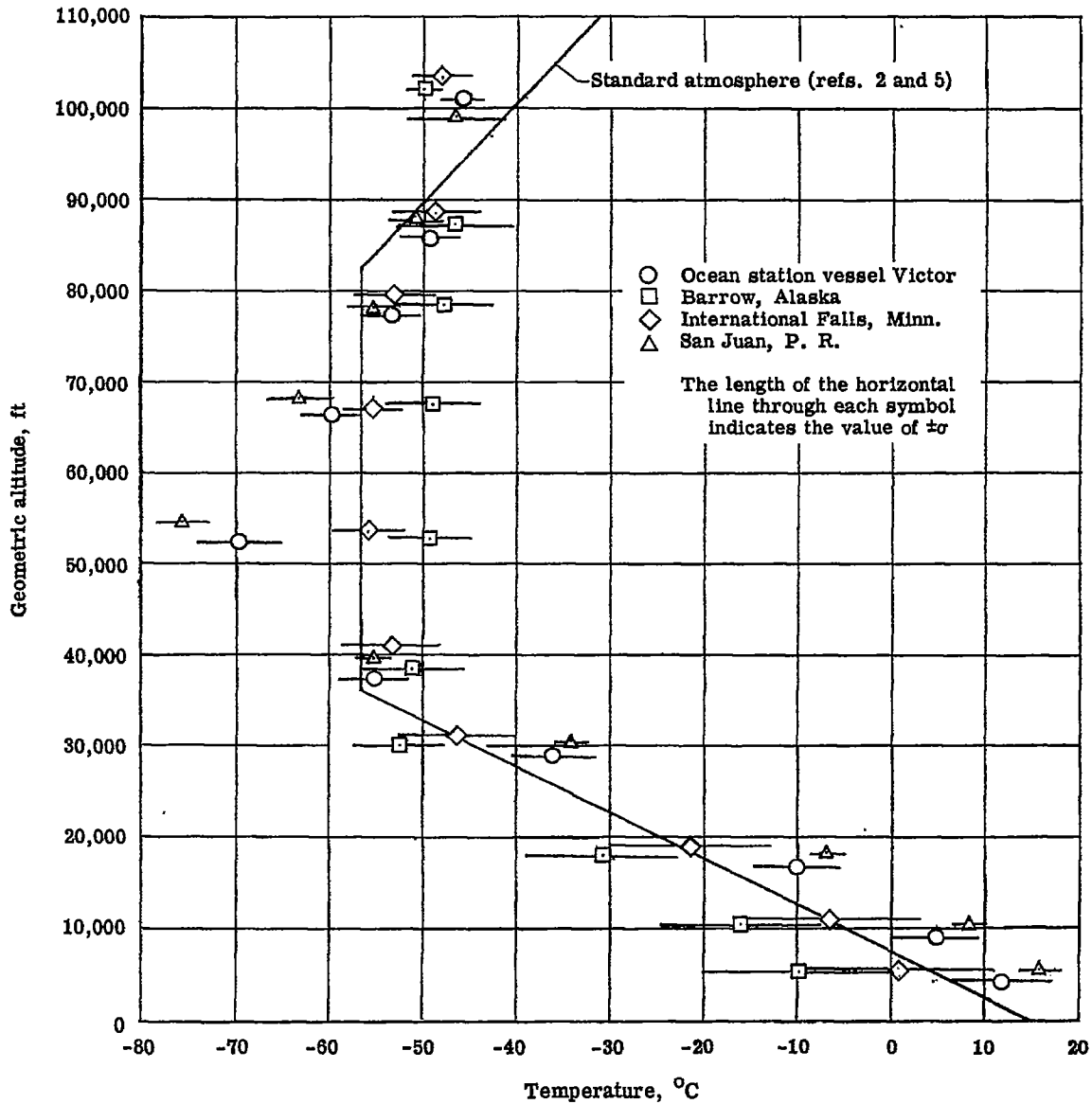


Figure 1.- Comparison of upper-air temperature measurements for several geographic locations with temperatures for standard atmosphere.