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TECHNICAL REPORT ES-19

CLIMATIC ATLAS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA (Temperature, Rainfall, Temperature-Humidity Index)

by

Howard L. Ohman Desert and Tropic Laboratory Earth Sciences Division

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FOREWORD

A few features of the environment of Southeast Asia were described in a brief report published by this Division in June 1962, "Notes on Some Environmental Conditions Affecting Military Logistics in Thailand." The 20 pages of maps and graphs contained in this preliminary study emphasize selected climatic and land surface properties of Thailand and neighboring countries during the wettest and driest months of the year.

The present study focuses on the climate of Southeast Asia, and treats it more thoroughly than the earlier study. The 87 maps contained in the Atlas cover several aspects of temperature and rainfall as well as the temperature-humidity index, a device employed to provide a clue to human discomfort during the warmest hours of the day in the various sections of the region. Unlike the earlier study, maps have been prepared for every month of the year.

As both producer and user of this Atlas, the Earth Sciences Division appreciates the limitations as well as the value of this or any other collection of maps based on " arithmetic means. The discerning user will be aware of the need for information in addition to that which can be retrieved from the maps, such as the frequency and duration of critical temperatures or the expectancy rates of particular weather types. These, as well as other more sophisticated studies, are in the making and will be forthcoming as separate publications. At the same time, no disparagement of the utility of maps based on mean values is intended. They continue to be useful for making broad quantitative comparisons between parts of the earth's surface. Most systems of climatic classification (e.g., Köppen and Thornthwaite) are oased on monthly means. They also provide a convenient summation of energy over a period of time for purposes such as determining the month-by-month fuel requirements for heating. Where materiel is stored in large masses, as in warehouses, monthly means provide a good indication of temperature conditions within the interior of the storage mass.

In spite of any shortcomings that the maps in this Atlas may have, they should be useful in research and development and logistical planning for Southeast Asia. They also contribute to the general fund of scientific information concerning the environment of the area.

Appreciation is expressed to the many individuals within the Earth Sciences Division who contributed to the preparation of this Atlas.

> L.W. TRUEBLOOD Chief Earth Sciences Division

APPROVED:

DALE H. SIELING, Ph. D. Scientific Director

W.W. VAUGHAN Brigadier General, USA Commanding

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CLIMATIC ATLAS FOR SOUTHEAST ASIA

1. Introduction

This Atlas describes the climate of Southeast Asia in a way that will be helpful to the Army in solving the many problems that are likely to arise during operations in this part of the world. Its maps provide coverage by month for the following elements: mean monthly temperature, mean daily maximum temperature, mean daily minimum temperature, absolute maximum temperature, mean monthly precipitation, mean number of rainy days, and temperature-humidity index.* A map showing mean annual precipitation is also included. Two additional maps delineate the principal physiographic features of the region and locate the meteorological stations for which climatic data were available. Herein delineated, Southeast Asia consists of Thatland, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Burma (south of 25 degree north latitude), and the peninsular portion of Malaysia.

It is expected that the maps contained in this study will be used principally for planning purposes and staff briefings. With this in mind, the maps were designed to emphasize the changing patterns of climate, both with respect to place-to-place variations within the region, and month-to-month changes through the year. When used in conjunction with other studies on the climate of Southeast Asia (1, 2, 3, 4, 12), the maps provide a fairly complete picture of the changing month-'o-month patterns of climate within the region.

In drawing the maps, certain difficulties were encountered. Because of limitations imposed by map s ale, many minor variations of climate had to be ignored. As in most parts of the world, the network of meteorological stations for the study region is thin, particularly in mountainous areas; consequently, completion of the analysis depended largely on professional judgment in areas where data were lacking. The statistics used in the construction of the maps were taken from a number of sources and are based on station records of varying length. No attempt has been made to reduce the data to a commor, or normal time period, but some of the short-term records had to be ignored in the interest of "fitting" the isoplethic systems to the data field.

Because the arithmetic mean is used so extensively in this study, the potential user should be alerted to a popular misconception concerning its meaning. It is assumed frequently that the mean equals the median or 50th percentile, i.e., that it is a guide to the 50 percent probability value. This is the case only in frequency tabulations that are normal, a characteristic seldom observed in climatic distributions. Most frequency distributions of climatic elements are likely to be skewed in a manner causing divergence of the means and the 50th percentile. Fortunately, with respect to temperature, this divergence is small in the humid tropics and this is particularly true for the parts of Southeast Asia included in this study, with the possible exception of Laos and North Vietnam. As an example, for January (a month when the divergence is apt to be large) at Bangkok, Thailand, mean and median daily minimum temperatures are 67.70F and 70.70F, respectively, based on ten years of record. The mean and median daily maximum temperatures were even closer at 89. 1°F and 89. 6°F. Precipitation is another matter. For example, 50 years of January monthly mean values of precipitation at Phetchabun, Thailand, produce a period-of-record mean of 0.50 inch and a median of (, 00 inch. The wrong impression given by the mean is even more apparent when it is pointed out that 60 percent of the Januaries had 0,00 precipitation, and 80 percent had amounts less than the mean. It is unfortunate that maps of median monthly precipitation could not be prepared. The actual monthly values necessary for calculation of the median are available for only a few locations in Southeast Asia.

2. Climatic Brief on Southeast Asia

The climate of Southeast Asia is characterized as low latitude monsoon chiefly because of its tropical temperature regime and a well-established cycle of wet and dry seasons. In general, the southwest or wet monsoon prevails from mid-May to mid-September, and the northeast or dry monsoon predominates from mid-October to mid-March. Short transition

[•] See Section 6 for definitions of statistical terms.

MAP LIST

Maps and Map Series	Map Number
Physiography	1 4
Station Locations	2
Mean Monthly Temperature Series	- 3-14
Mean Daily Maximum Temperature Series	15-26 •
Mean Daily Minimum Temperature Series	27-38
Absolute Maximum Temperature Series	39-50
Mean Monthly Precipitation Series	51-62
Mean Annual Precipitation	63
Mean Number of Rainy Days Series	64-75
Temperature-Humidity Index Series	76-87

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ABSTRACT

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Eighty-seven maps present the distribution in Southeast Asia (Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Burma south of 25⁰N. Latitude, and the peninsular portion of Malaysia) of various climatic statistics of temperature, rainfall, and the temperature-humidity index. Maps for each month of the year have been prepared for: mean monthly temperature, mean daily maximum temperature, mean daily minimum temperature, absolute maximum ter perature, mean monthly rainfall, mean number of rainy days per month, and mean daily temperature-humidity index for the warmest hour of the day. Single maps of mean annual rainfall, the physiography of the region, and of the names and location of climatic stations are also included. The maps are drawn in considerable detail having been based not only on the available climatic data but also on the distribution of mountain ranges, major water bodies, and other geographic features. A brief text discusses the preparation of the maps and describes a few of the important distributional aspects of climate shown by the maps.

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^{*} See Section 6 for definitions of statistical terms.

periods in spring and fall separate the two principal monsoon seasons. The intensity and timing of the rainy season, however, varies considerably with location, so that local variations of climate are numerous and in some instances sharp. Topography is the chief cause for climatic modification, with the Annam Mountain Range, paralleling the Vietnamese coast on the east, and the peninsular ranges of Burma and Thailand on the west, being particularly significant relief features. Windward slopes of these ranges are characteristically cloudy and rainy, whereas leeward slopes are relatively cloud-free and rainless.

The southwest monsoon is typified by airflow from the subtropical high pressure cells of the southern hemisphere to a low pressure cell centered over interior Asia. The air transported into the region is warm, moist, and unstable, causing heavy local showers and thunderstorms in most sections of the region. For the most part, the showers occur during the afternoon hours, caused chiefly by the combined effects of orography and convection, and are especially heavy on the western and southwestern slopes of the major mountain ranges. Owing to the protection afforded by the Annam Mountain Range, the eastern coastal districts of Vietnam frequently experience periods of weather that are clear and drv. The heavy rains of summer may cause extensive flooding of low lying areas, particularly the flood plains of the major rivers in Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, and South Vietnam. Temperatures during the summer monsoon are not exceptionally high on the average, ranging from the high eightles or low nineties during the hottest part of the day to the high seventies or low eightles during the coolest part of the night in most sections of the region. In the mountains, temperatures are lower, decreasing at a rate of about 3 degrees Fahrenheit for every 1,000 feet increase in elevation.

The northeast or winter monsoon season is characterized by easterly or northeasterly airflow that brings comparatively cool and dry air into Southeast Asia, particularly the northernmost sections of the region. Temperatures during winter are not extreme, generally reaching into the high sixties or low seventies during the afternoon hours, and dropping to the mid-fifties at night in northern sections. In the south and in the peninsular portions of the region, temperatures are some 5 to 10 degrees higher both day and night. Occasional frosts have been experienced in the upland districts of the north, the coldest section in general. Snowfall is all but unknown throughout the region except perhaps at the higher elevations in the north. During the winter monsoon, precipitation is heavier and more frequent along the east coast of Vietnam and in the peninsular portions of Thailand and Malaysia than in other districts. In both these areas, the winter rains are caused by moisture-laden air arriving at the coasts after lengthy trajectories over relatively large and warm bodies of water. As the air ascends the slopes of the mountain ranges inland from the coasts, condensation takes place, and much cloudiness and rairy weather of the showery type results. Highest temperatures for the region in general occur during April, a transition month when skies are clear and the air dry. During April, daily maximum temperatures frequently exceed 100°F, and on some occasions 116°F at locations well removed from the coasts, particularly in Burma and Thailand. Extremes above 100°F are practically unknown at coastal sites where the maritime influence prevents undue heating of the atmosphere.

3. The Map Series

a. Mean Monthly Temperature (Maps 3-14)

Mean temperatures are fairly uniform throughout Southeast Asia. When compared at the same or similar elevations, temperatures differ little from one section of the region to another. Effects of latitude are evidenced chiefly in the northern uplands of the region where winter cooling causes mean temperatures to drop to levels between 65° and 70° F during the coldest month (January). By comparison, temperatures for the warmest month (April) average between 80° and 85° F in the same area. This difference of 15 to 20 degrees in mean monthly temperature between the coldest and warmest months is the widest mean annual temperature range for the study region. In the peninsular portions of Thailand and Malaysia, seasonality is not nearly so evident, with most stations showing means for both coldest and warmest months near or slightly above 80° F, and a mean annual temperature range of less than 5 degrees Fahrenheit. The lowest monthly temperatures drop to levels between 55° and 60° F at crest elevations.

b. Mean Daily Maximum Temperature (Maps 15-26)

The maps for mean daily maximum temperature show patterns much like those of mean monthly temperatures: some seasonality in the north, uniform temperature regime in general, and sharply contrasting thermal districts in the mountains. This set of maps represents average mid-afternoon temperatures since the daily maximum is generally reached about 1400 hours LST. The maps show that the heat center for Southeast Asia is located in the Irrawaddy River lowlands of Burma, where mean daily maximum temperatures are in excess of 100°F during the warmest month, April. At all coastal locations including those of Vietnam, Cambodia, Burma, Thailand, and Malaysia the high molsture content of the air has a moderating influence on temperatures. Consequently, mean daily maximum temperatures for the warmest month are not as high as those for interior sites, averaging from 86° to 94°F for the most part.

c. Mean Daily Minimum Temperature (Maps 27-38)

Like the mean monthly and the mean daily maximum temperature maps, the maps of mean daily minimum temperature reflect the influence of high relief, location in the low latitudes, and monsoonal control of the temperature regime. Since the daily minimum temperature is generally reached about 1/2 hour before surrise, the maps show the average distribution of temperature during the coldest part of the relative warmth of Southeast Asia throughout the year is emphasized by this series, for even during January, the coldest month, mean daily minima remain above 50° F in all districts (mountains excepted), and above 70° F in the peninsular districts of the south.

d. Absolute Maximum Temperature (Maps 39-50)

The maps for absolute maximum temperature show the same basic patterns of temperature distribution as the maps for mean monthly and mean daily maximum temperatures. During April, the warmest month, temperatures above 110° F have been experienced at one time or another at nearly every station in the central Irrawaddy River valley of Burma, the "hot spot" for the region in general. The highest temperature ever recorded anywhere within Southeast Asia is 114° F, reached during April at Mandalay, Burma. Central Thailand similarly is an area conducive to very high temperatures during the hot season. Here, many stations show absolute maxima for April in the $105^{\circ}-110^{\circ}$ F range. At coastal sites, the moderating influence of oceanic water bodies on heating of the atmosphere is quite apparent, with absolute maxima being held mostly to the mid-to high-ninety degree range. During the cold months, December for example, the highest temperatures attainable generally do not exceed 95° F in northern districts and 100° F in the south.

c. Mean Monthly and Annual Precipitation (Maps 51-63)

For most of Southeast Asia, winter is the dry season and summer the wet. Gener'lly, more than 80 percent of the rain falls from April through October, the season of the principal or southwest monsoon. Heavy monsoonal rains usually begin the second or third week in April, earlier in the south, later in the far northwest, and continue to the first or second week in November. The timing of the onset and ending of the rainy season, however, is extremely unstable, varying as much as 30 days from one year to the rest. Monthly rainfall intensities during the wet season vary greatly from place to place depending on exposure and elevation. For example, the map for July shows much areal contrast, with all mountain regions receiving upwards of 10 inches of rain, while the Central Valley of Thailand and the Irrawaddy lowlands of Burma receive only 2 to 5 inches. The dry season, extending from mid-November to mid-April is long and severe. Through the central and northern districts of the region, monthly rainfall averages only a small fraction of an inch during this period, and nowhere exceed one inch.

The Kra plain of Thatland and small adjoining districts of Malaysia constitute exceptions to the usual cycle of one prolonged dry and one well defined wet season each year. In these areas the annual rainfall regime displays two seasonal praks, with considerable rain in all months. The southwest morsoon causes a primary rainy season from April to mid-August, and the northeast, or retreating monsoon, a shorter but intenso rainy season from September to December, with November the wettest month of the year. Average rainfall totals between 20 to 30 inches are reported for November at many stations on this exposed coast.

On an annual basis, rainfall is heaviest in the coastal and mountain districts of peninsular Burma, where totals exceed 200 inches in places. Other areas of heavy rainfall include the coastal mountain districts of Cambodia with upwards of 150 inches, the uplands and eastern lowlands of Malaysia with generally more than 100 and up to 200 inches of rainfall in places, and the western and southwestern slopes of the Annam Mountain Range of Vietnam and Laos with totals between 100 and 150 inches. Rainfall is least in the Irrawaddy lowlands of Central Burma and in the Central Valley of Thatiand where it averages less than 30 inches per year. In South Vietnam, a small section of the southeastern coastal zone receives less than 40 inches annually, also a scant amount for that part of the world.

f. Mean Number of Rainy Days (Maps 64-75)

This series of maps also provides striking evidence of the alternation of the wet and dry seasons. From December to April, less than one day of rain per month is recorded on the average for all of Southeast Asia except for portions of peninsular Thailand and Malavsia where 15 to 20 days with rain per month is not unusual. During this period, skies are typically cloudless, visibilities unrestricted, and rain, even in small intensities, is a rarity. Beginning with May, however, and continuing to November, the monthly patterns of rainy days change to ones of sharp contrast with those of the dry season. All wet-season months show rain-day occurrence rates of at least 6 and generally more than 10 days in most sections of the region. July is the month having the highest frequency of rain-days, with more than 20 days of rain occurring in many sections. Even higher rates can be expected, however, on exposed mountain sloper and windward coasts where practically every day is a rain-day.

g. Temperature-Humidity Index (Maps 76-87)

The maps of temperature-humidity index provide a means for estimating the monthly average degree of discomfort that can be expected during the hottest part of the day (mid-afternoon). The maps were drawn to data derived by Thom's method ⁽³¹⁾ of computing the discomfort index (DI), * the formula for which reads: DI = 0.4 ($t_d + t_w$) + 15, in which t_d is the dry-bulb temperature, and t_w , the wet-bulb temperature. To obtain representative mid-afternoon values for DI, the mean maximum temperature was used as the value for t_d and, for t_w a value based on computations involving the mean daily maximum temperature and the average mid-afternoon relative humidity was used. It is recognized that results may be slightly high, but the degree of over-estimation is not considered serious.

The DI is a good indicator of personal discomfort, but by no means is infallible, since people respond differently to the same degree of climatic stress. Generally, however, many people begin to feel discomfort when the DI rises above 70, and when it reaches 75, most people become unconfortable. When the index reaches 79, everyone is uncomfortable, with most people acutely so. Above 80, discomfort becomes serious. It should be recognized that the DI was designed primarily for indoor use. Outdoors, the degree of discomfort produced by any combination of temperature and humidity is decreased by the movement of air and increased by solar radiation.

As might be expected, the maps for the warmest months (March and April) show the highest levels of discomfort, both with respect to areal extent as well as degree of discomfort. During this period, some low-lying sections of central Burma and Thailand have a DI of 87, the highest index reached in the region. At the same time, other low-lying sections and much of the plateau districts have DI's above 81. The tropicality of the region is reflected to a degree in all maps. Even in January most of the area has DI's higher than 70.

• Called the temperature-humidity index (THI) by the U.S. Weather Bureau.

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5. Definitions

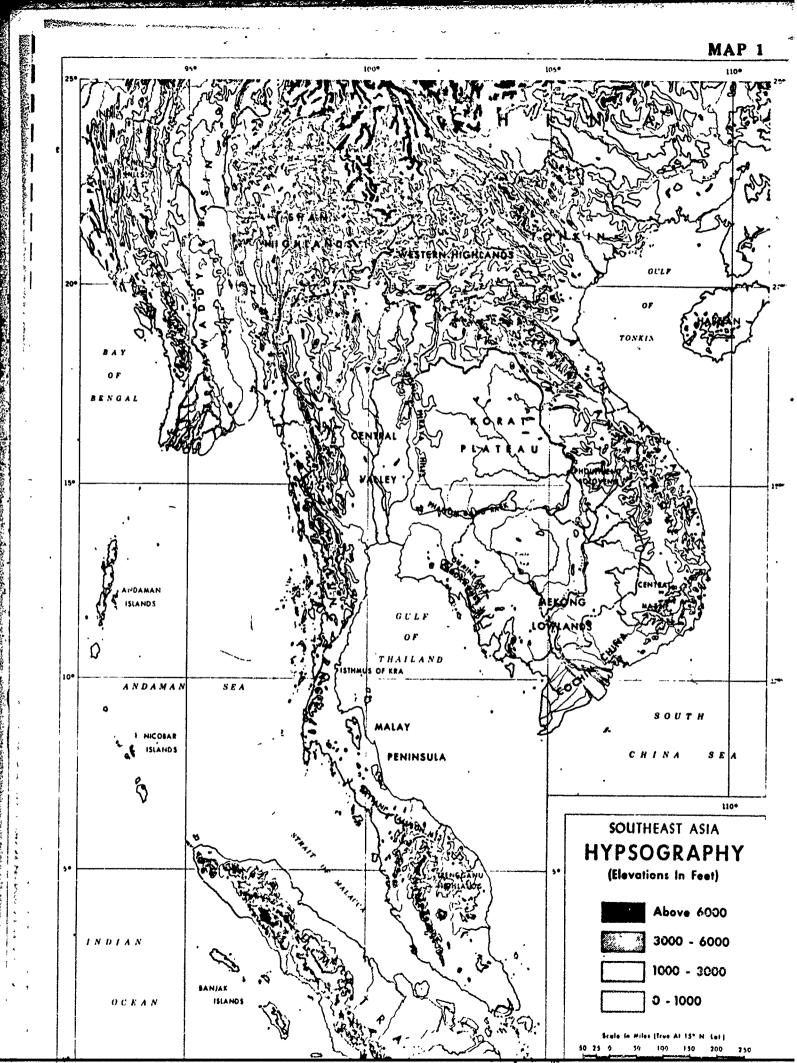
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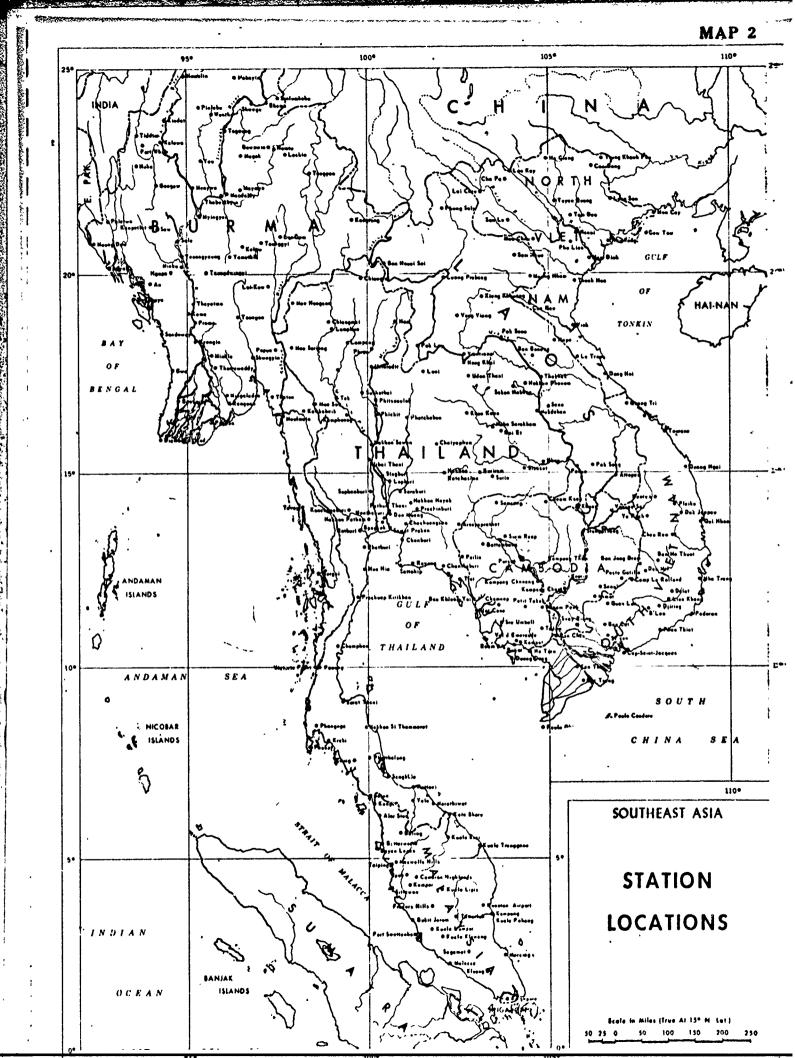
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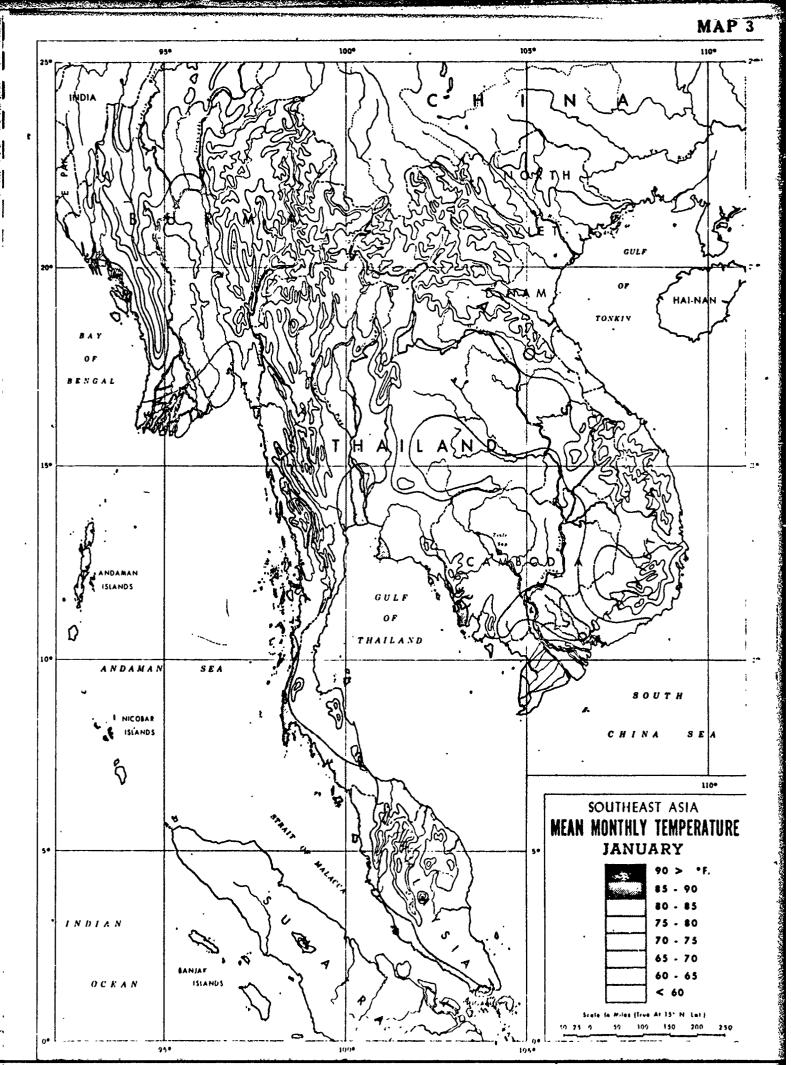
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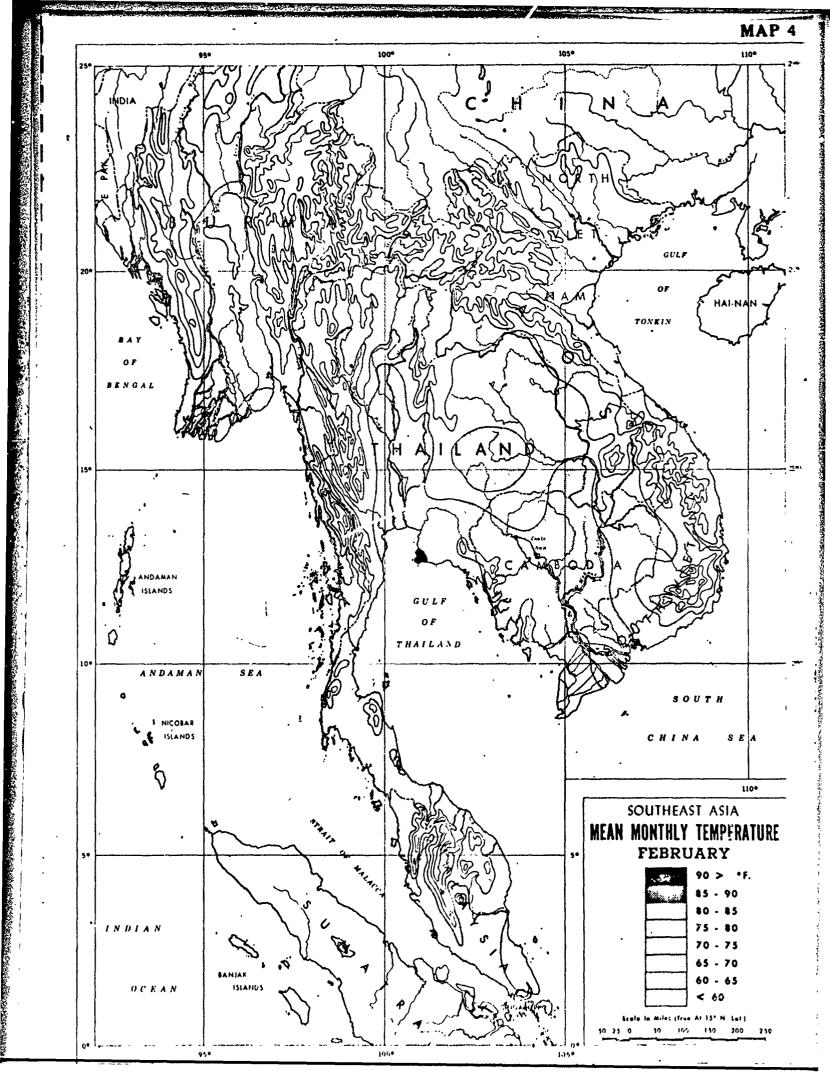
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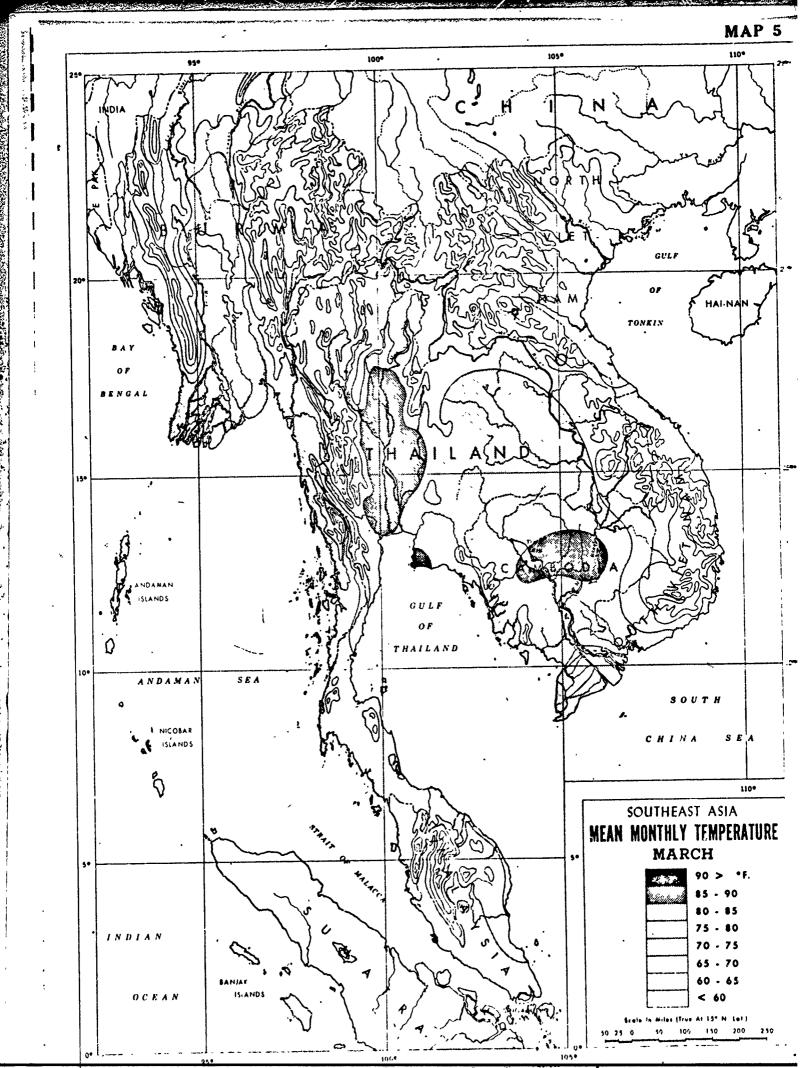
- 1. MEAN MONTHLY TEMPERATURE. Average of the mean temperatures of each day within the month for a period of years.
- 2. MEAN DAILY MAXIMUM TEMPERATURE. Average of the maximum temperatures of each day within a given period, usually a month, for a period of years.
- MEAN DAILY MINIMUM TEMPERATURE. Average of the minimum temperatures for each day within a given period, usually a month, for a period of years.
- 4. ABSOLUTE MAXIMUM TEMPERATURE. The highest temperature recorded during the period of record.
- 5. MEAN MONTHLY PRECIPITATION. Average of the precipitation totals of each day within the month for a period of years.
- 6. MEAN ANNUAL PRECIPITATION. Average of the precipitation totals of each month within a year for a period of years.
- 7. MEAN NUMBER OF RAINY DAYS. The number of days with rain within the month, averaged over a period of years. In Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand an amount equal to or greater than 0.004 inch of rain must be recorded in order to qualify as a rain-day. Corresponding amounts for Malaysia and Burma are 0.01 inch and 0.1 inch, respectively.
- **3. TEMPERATURE HUMIDITY INDEX.** A measure of human discomfort as computed by Thom's formula (31).

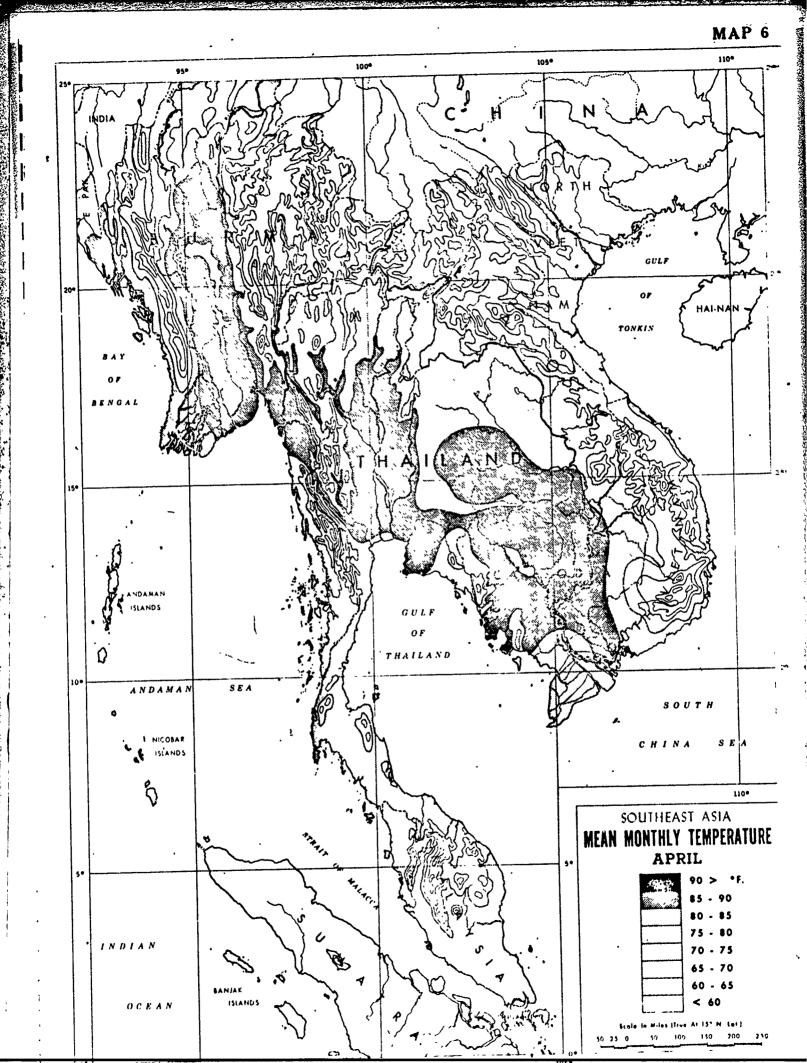


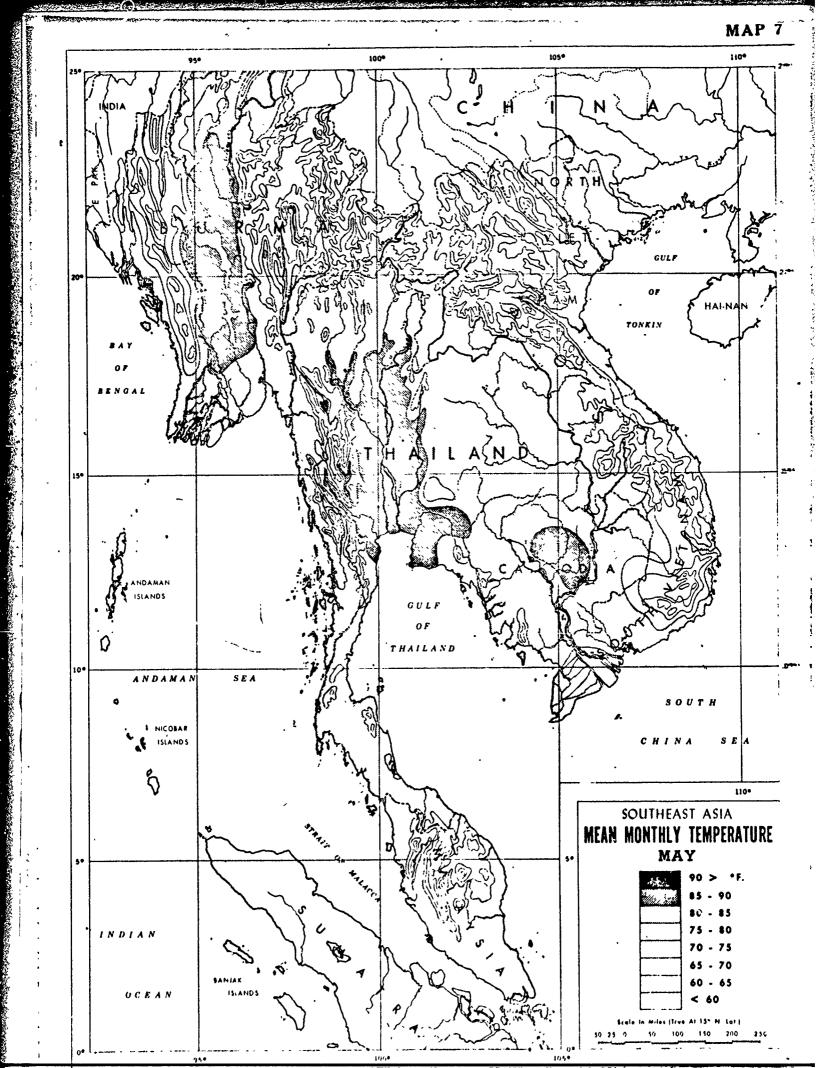


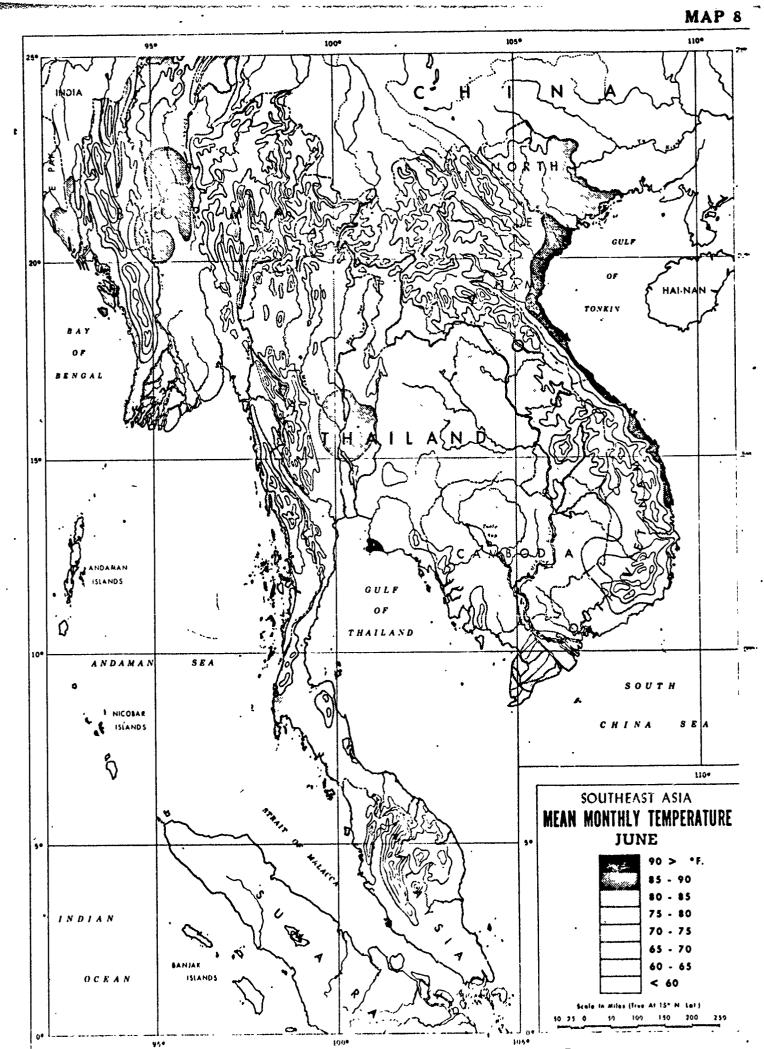


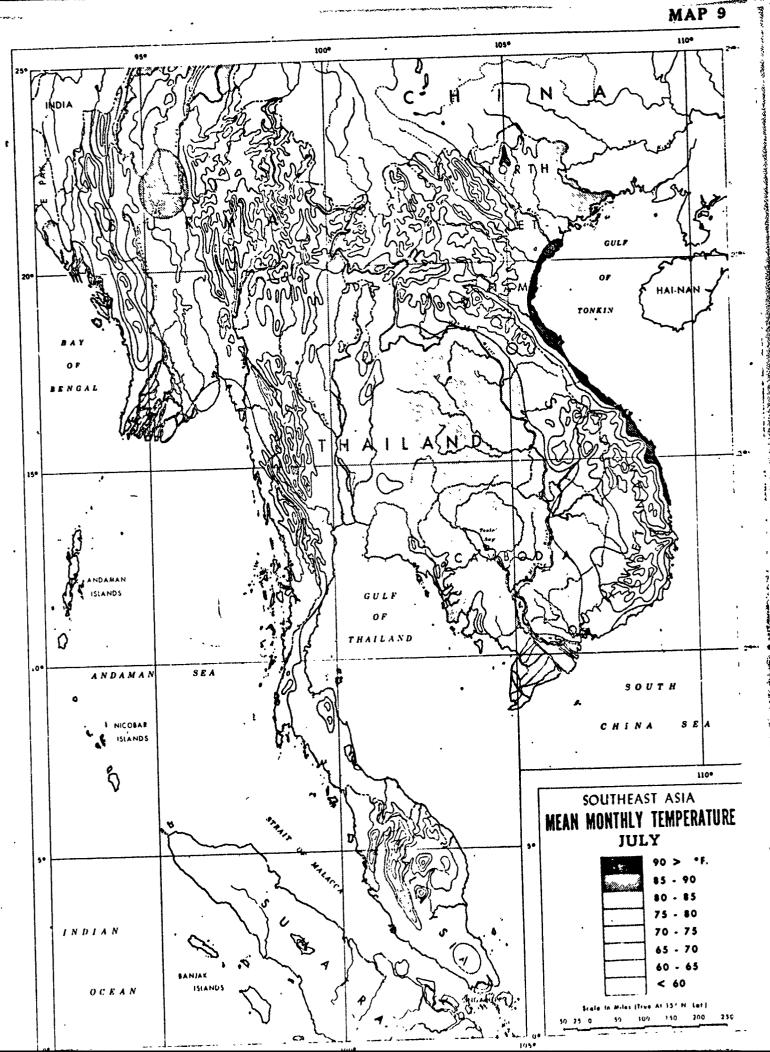


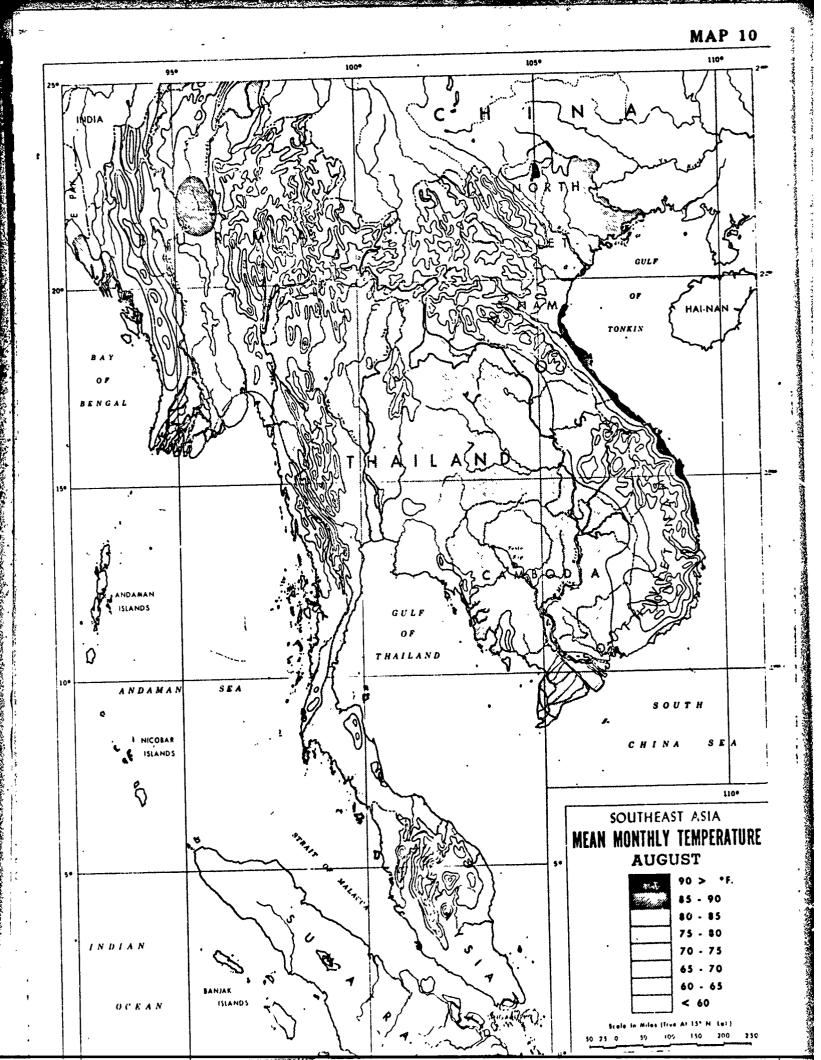


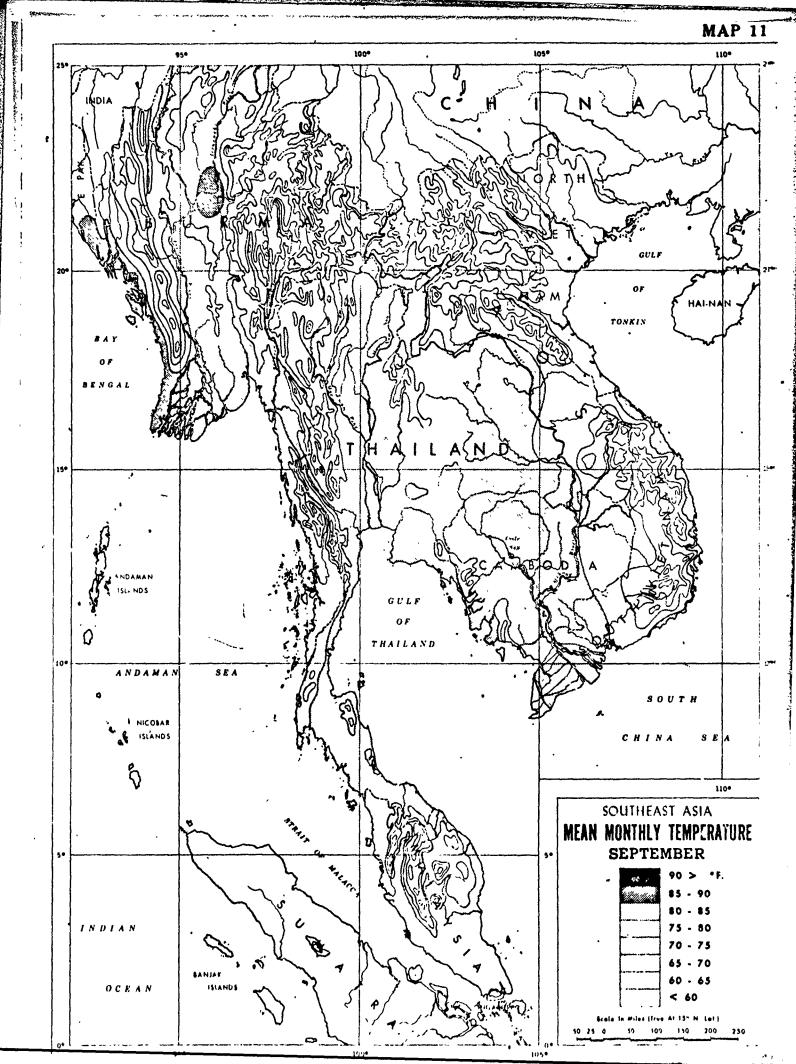


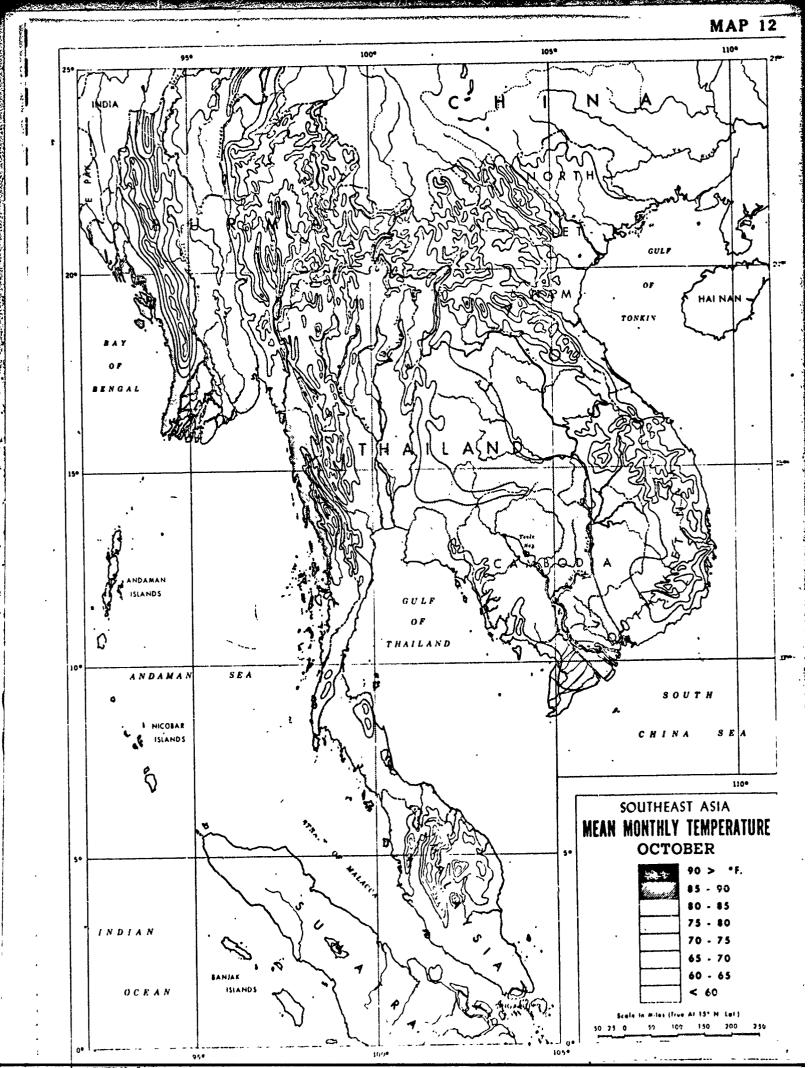


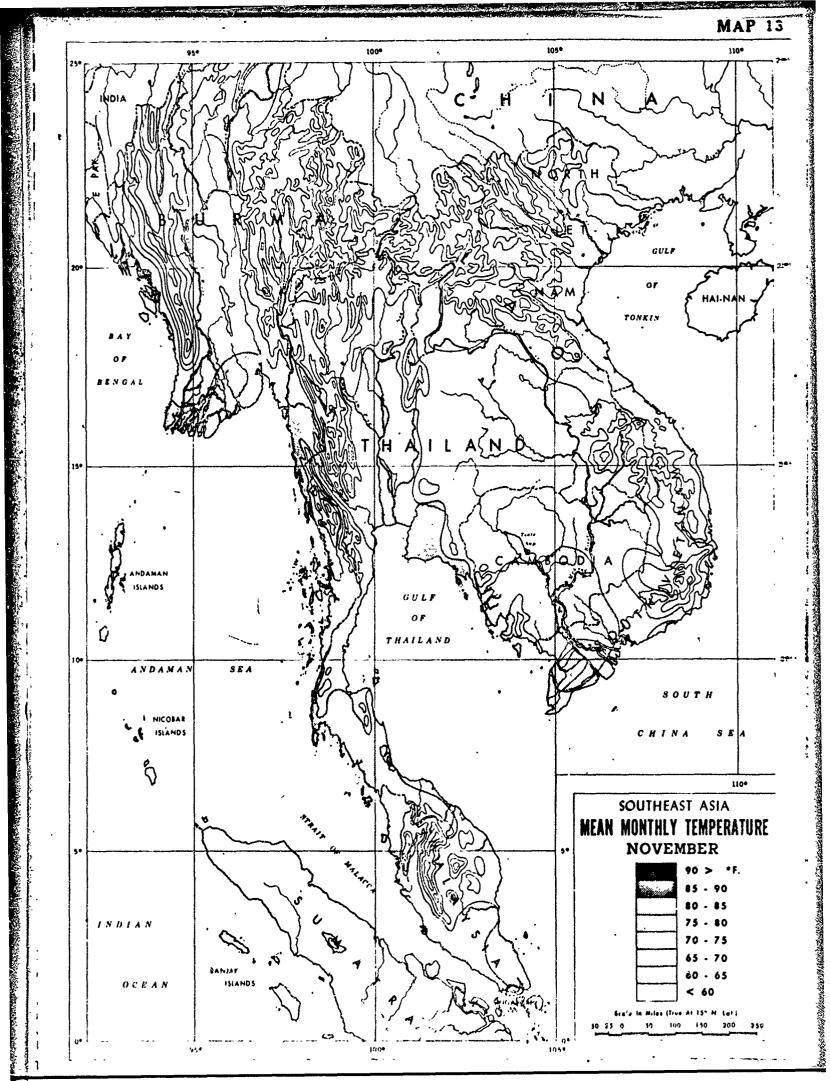


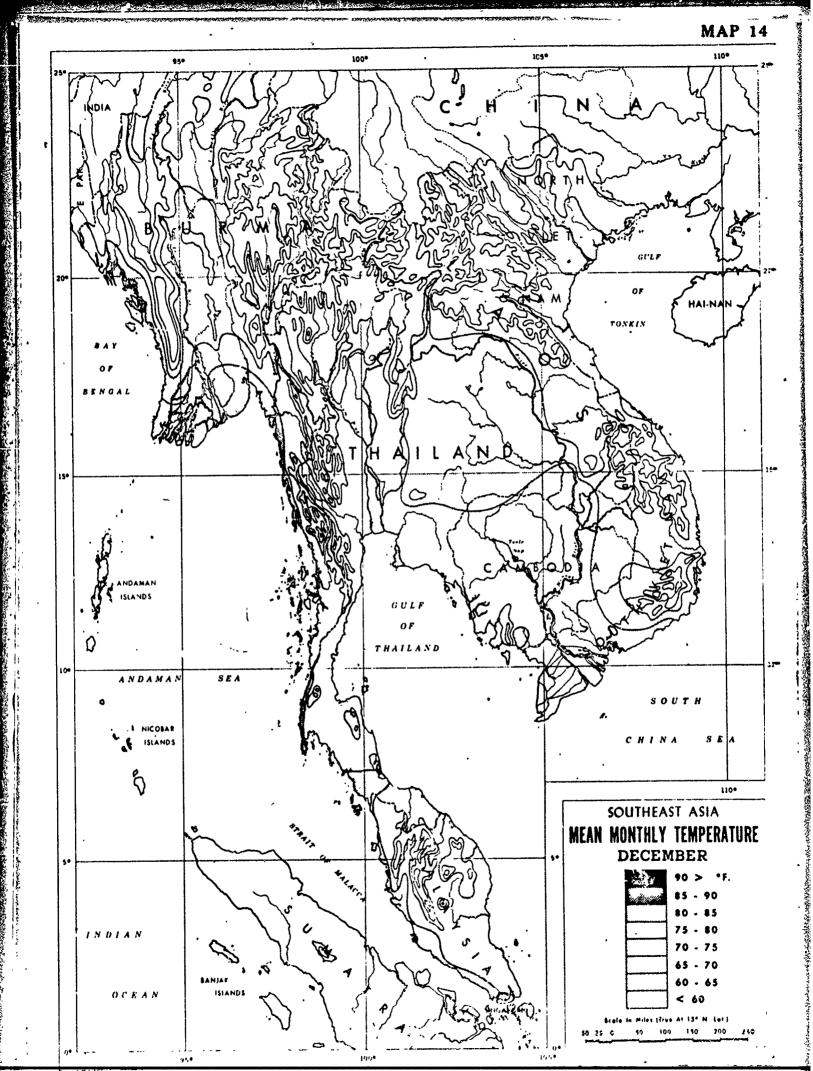




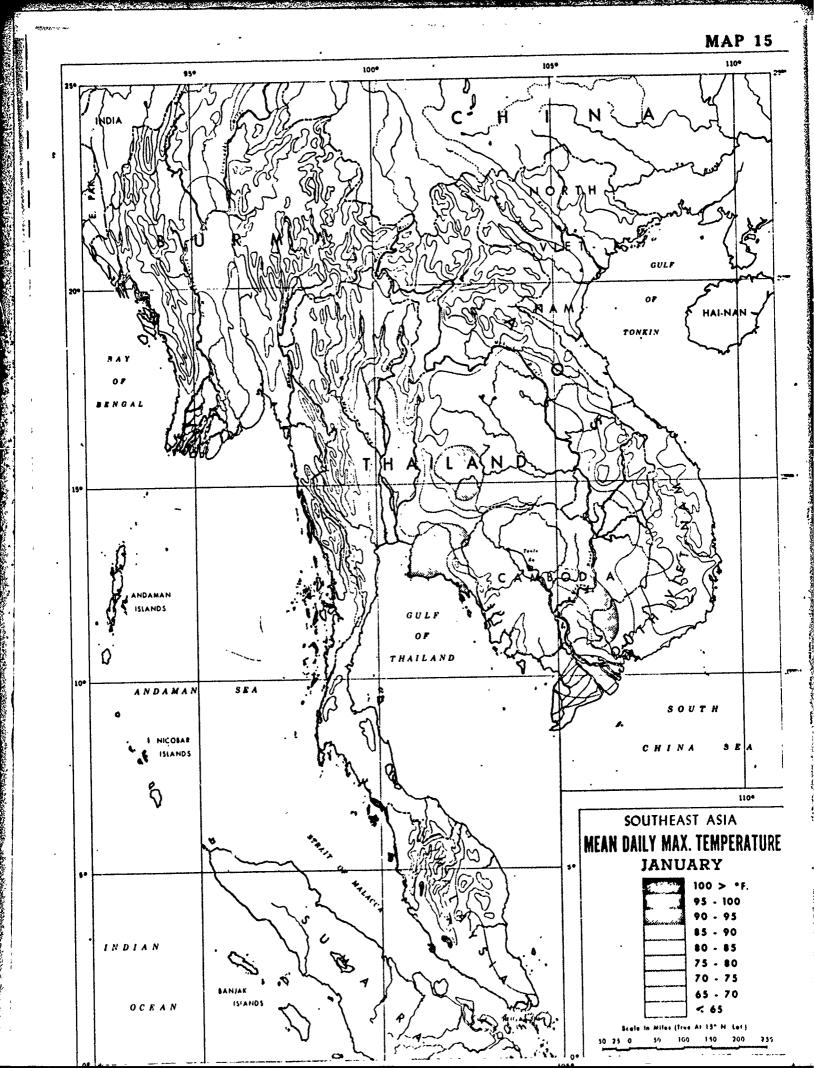


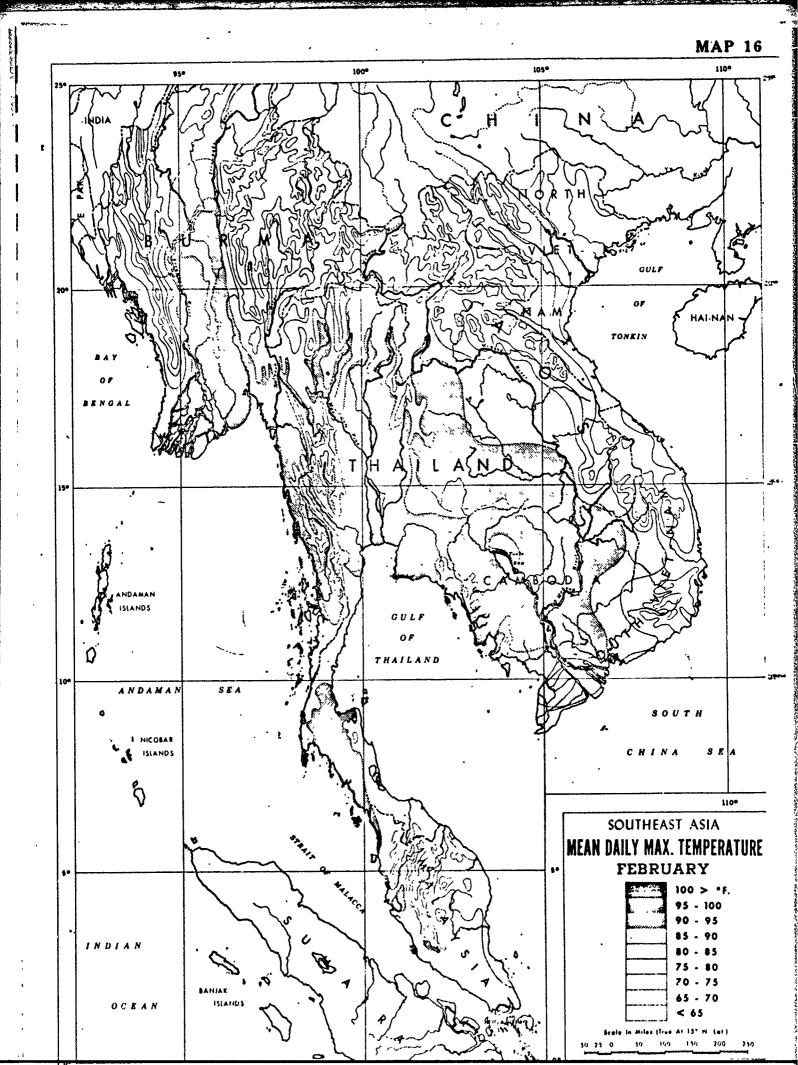


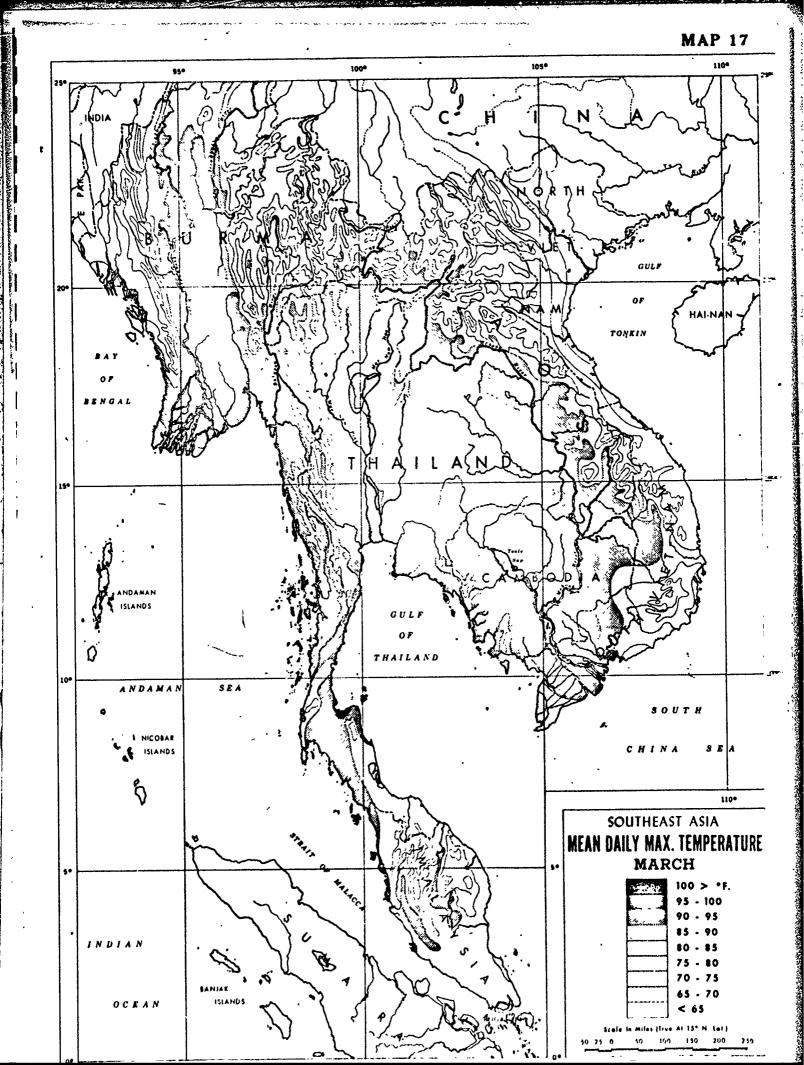




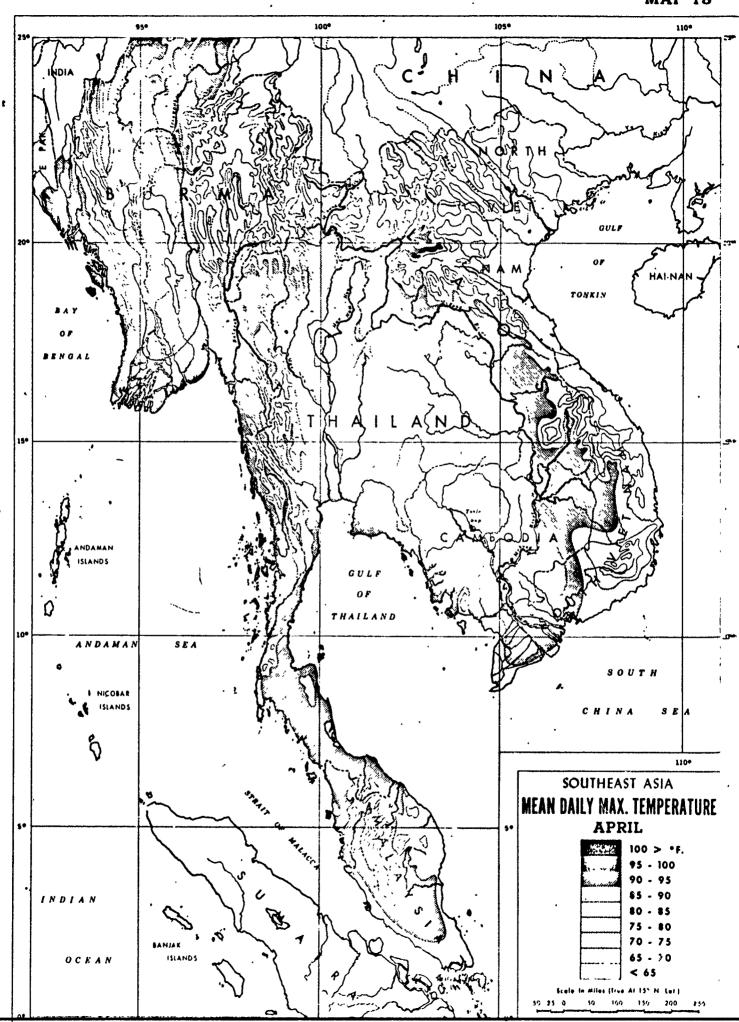
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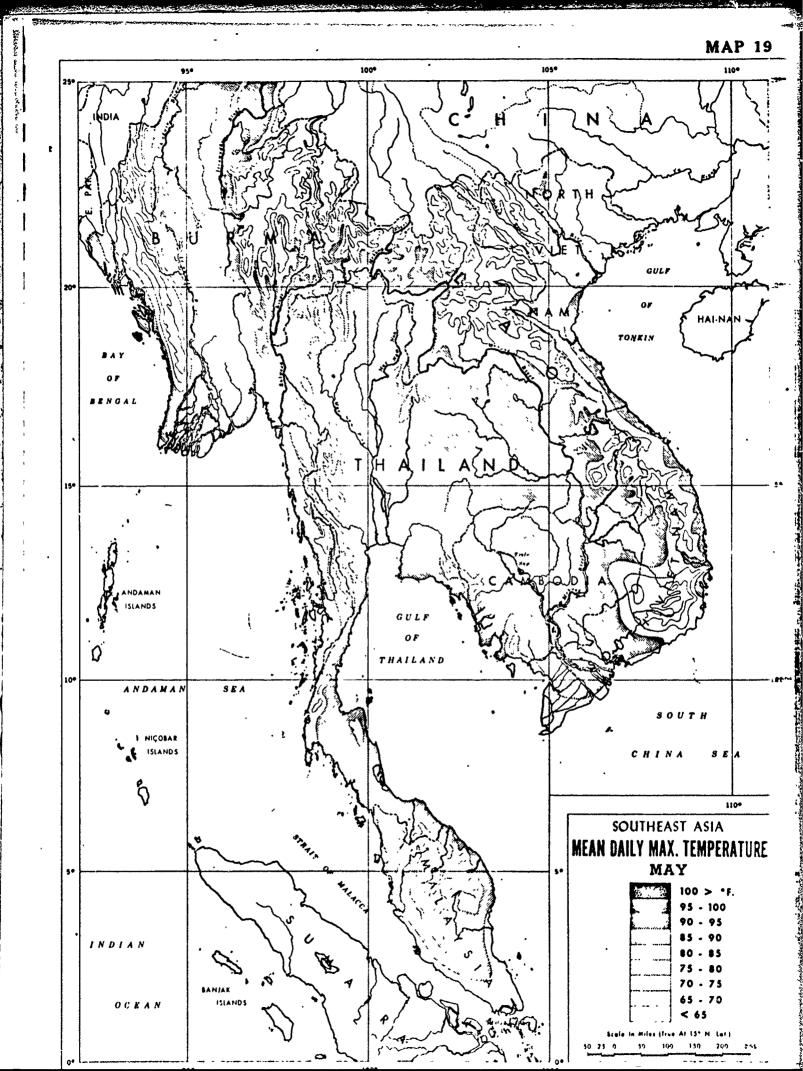


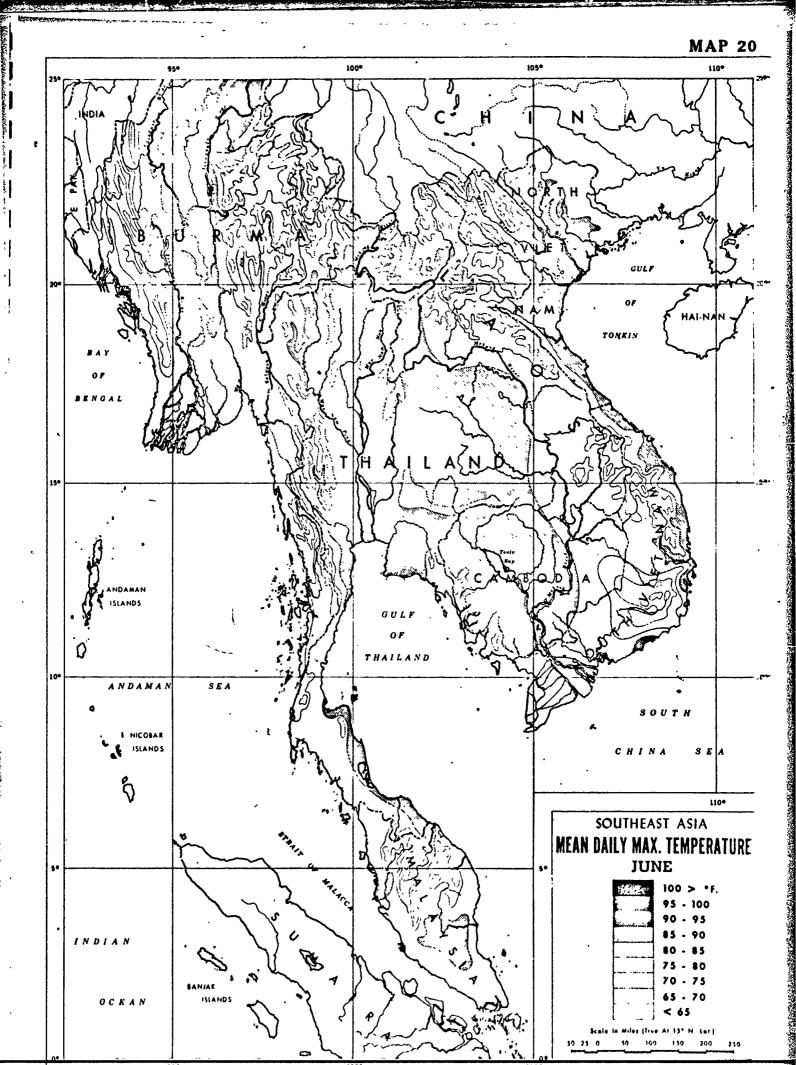




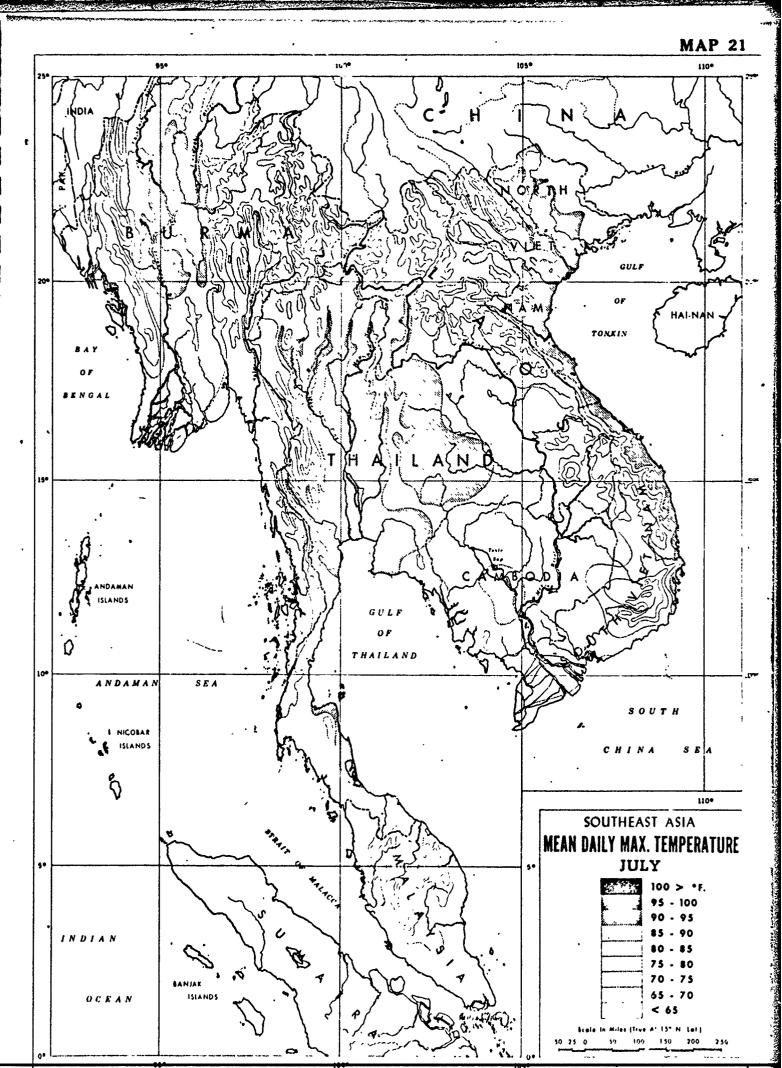


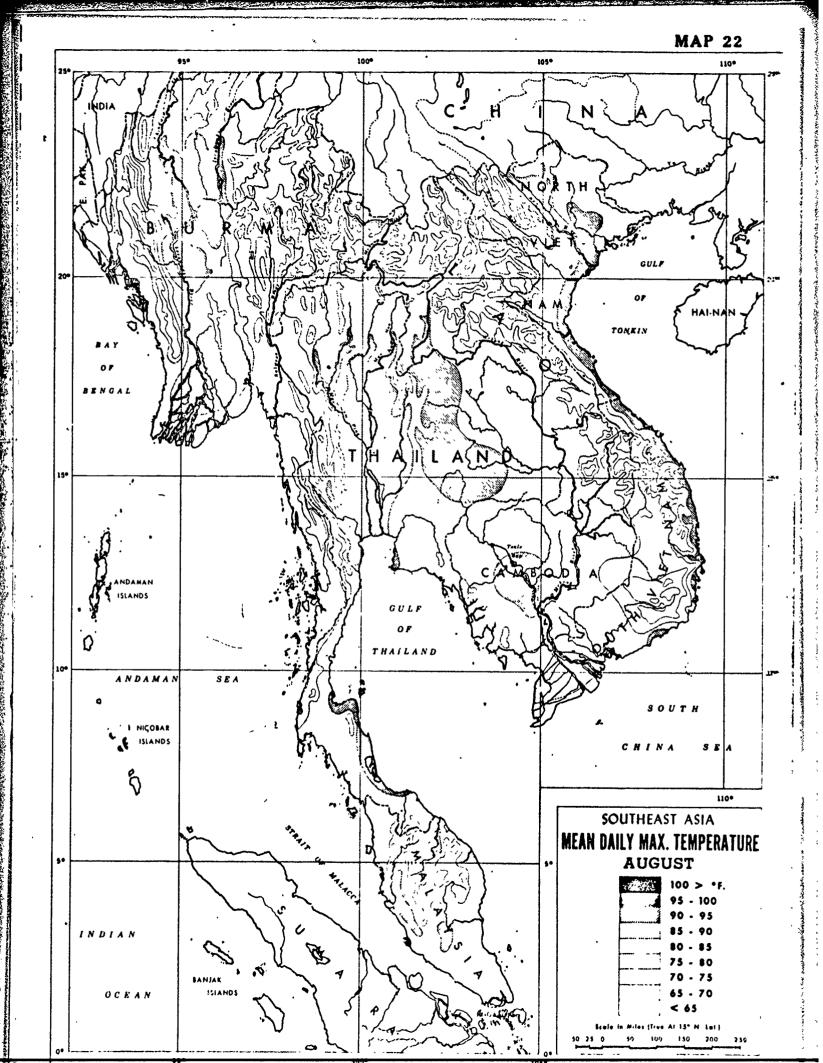
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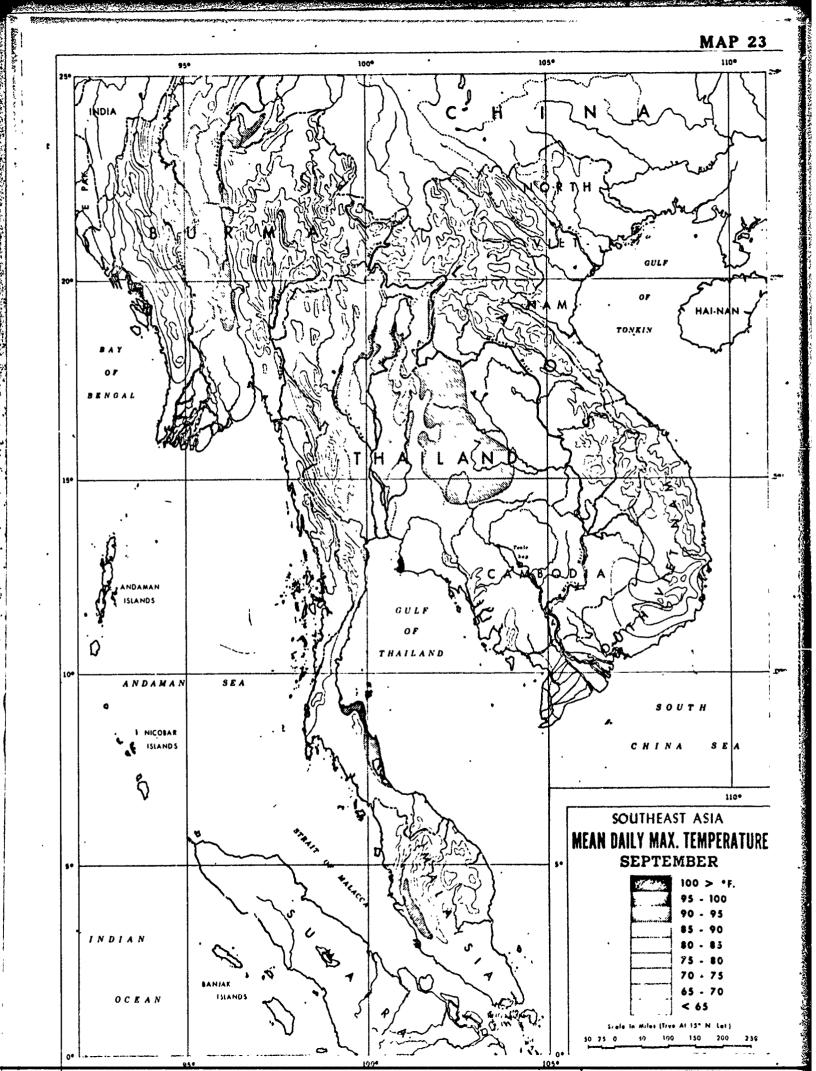




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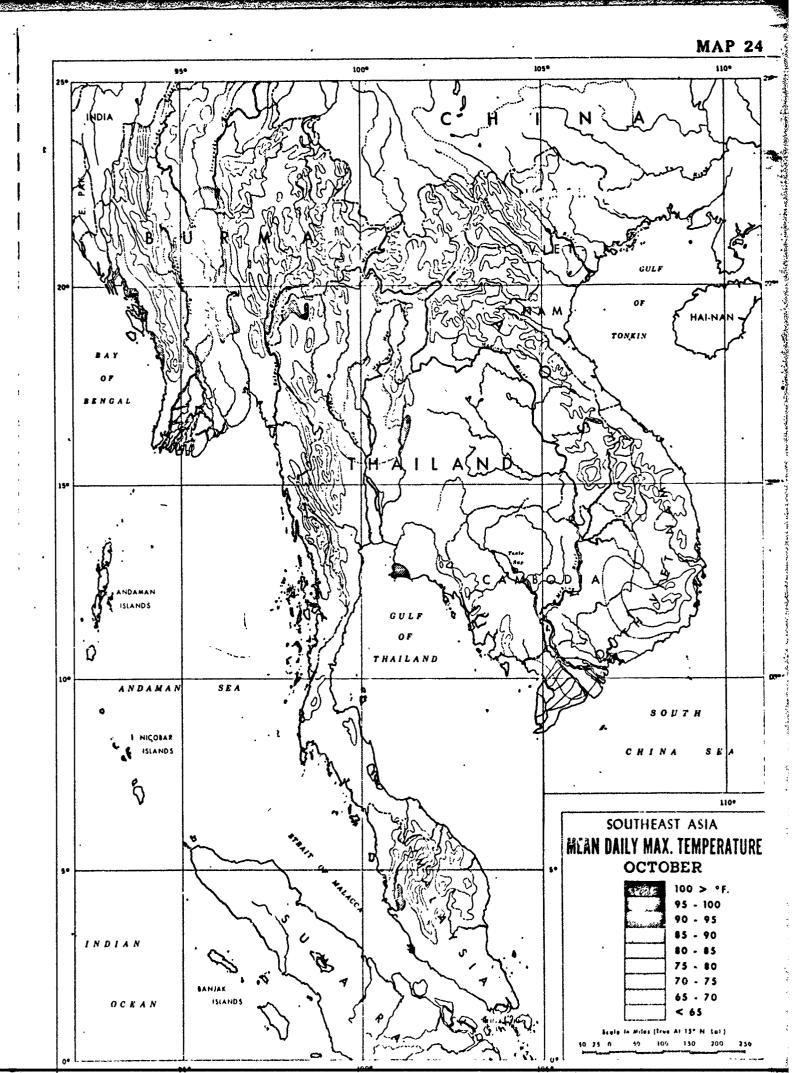


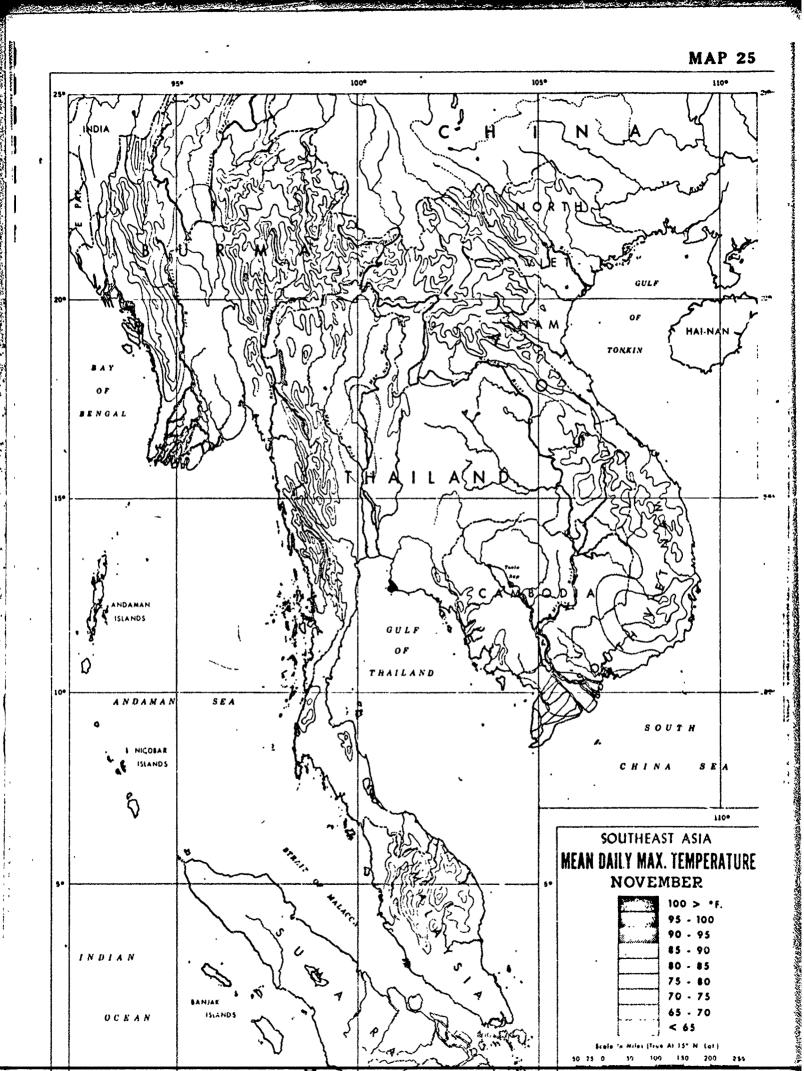


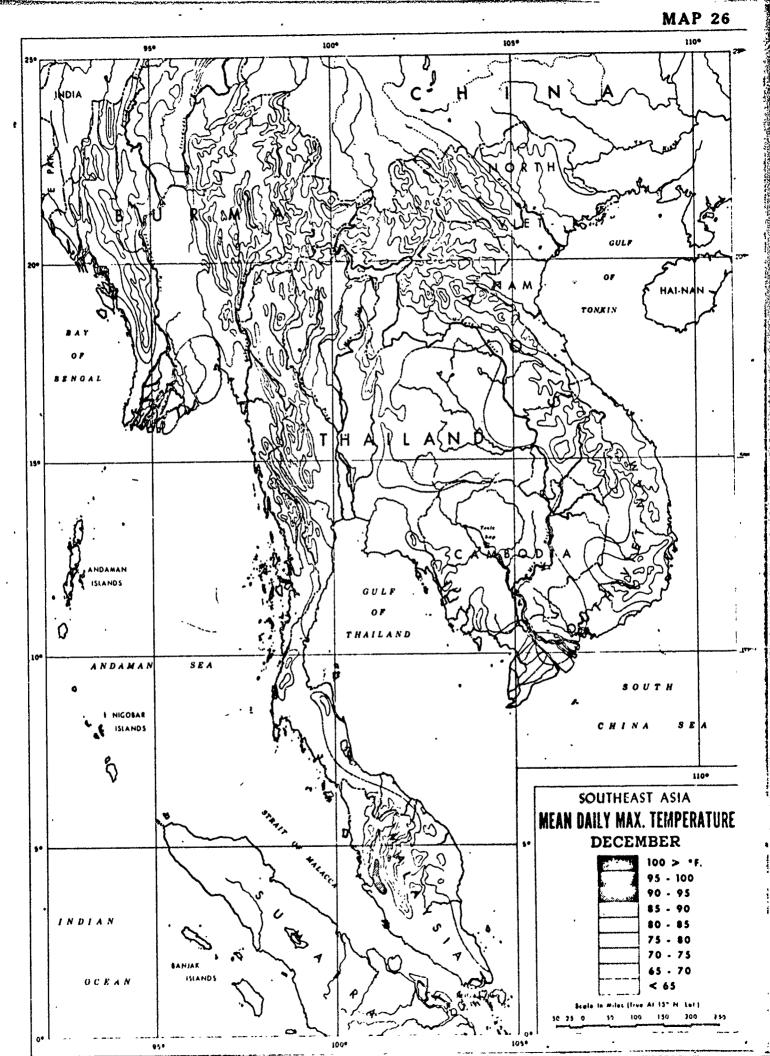


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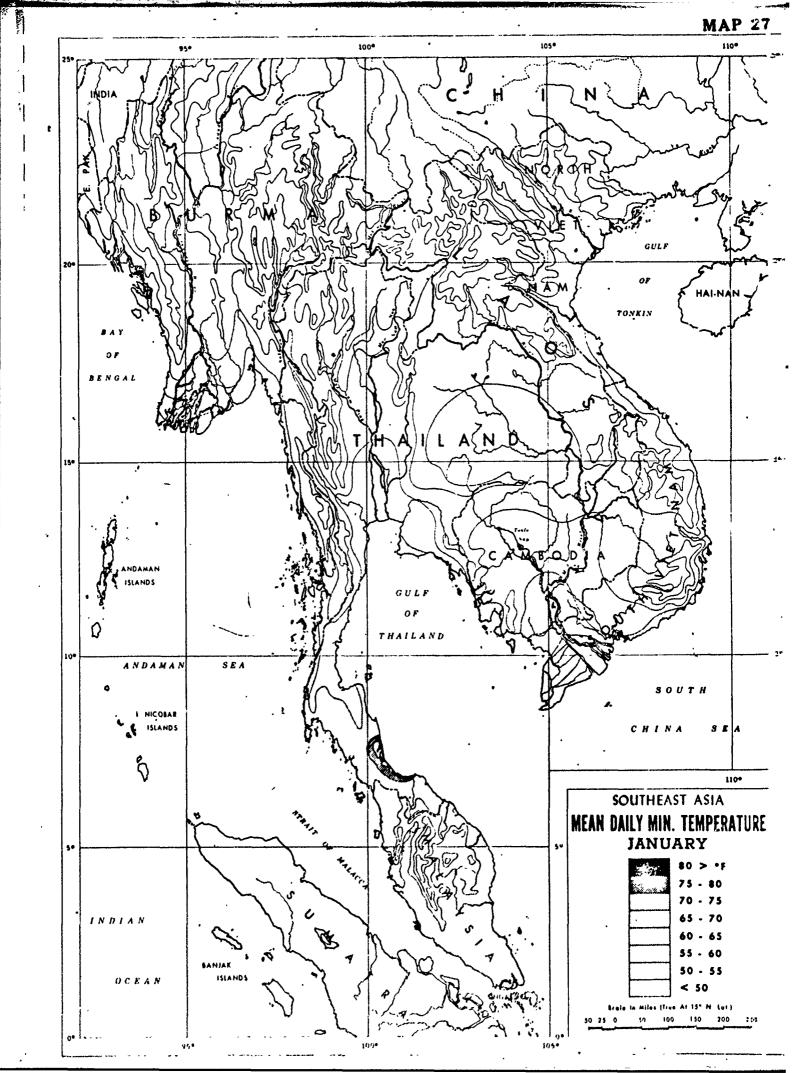
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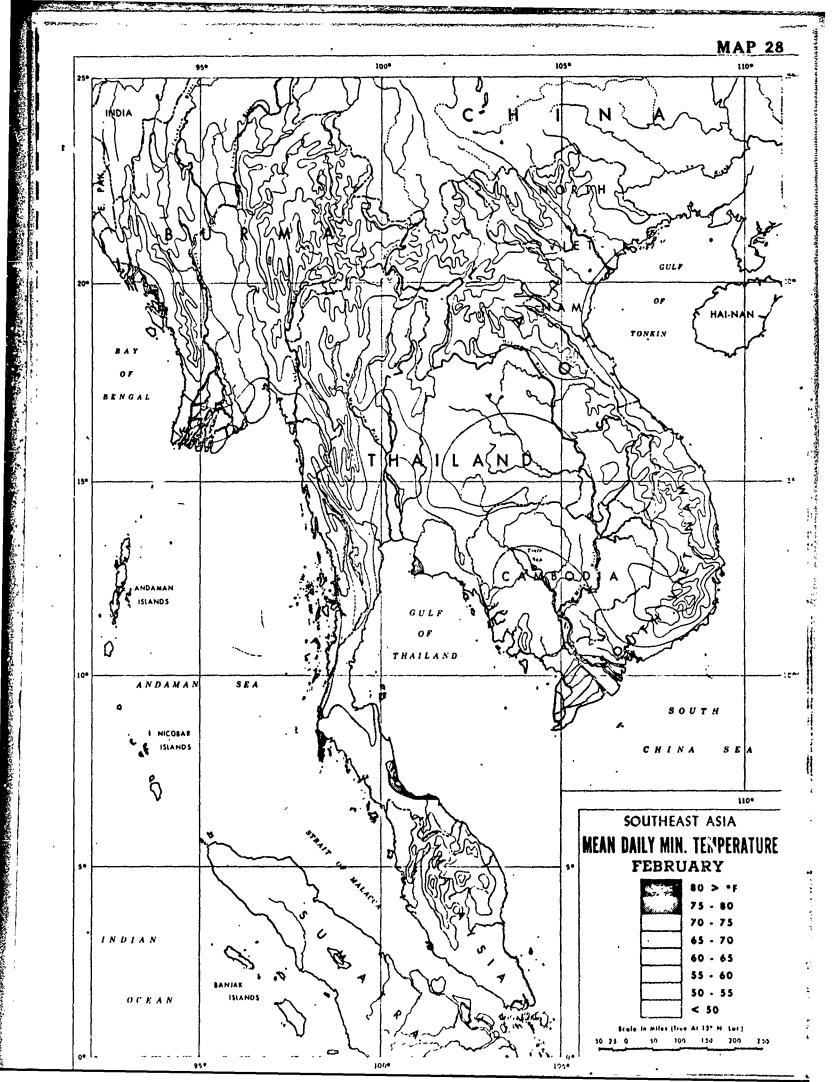


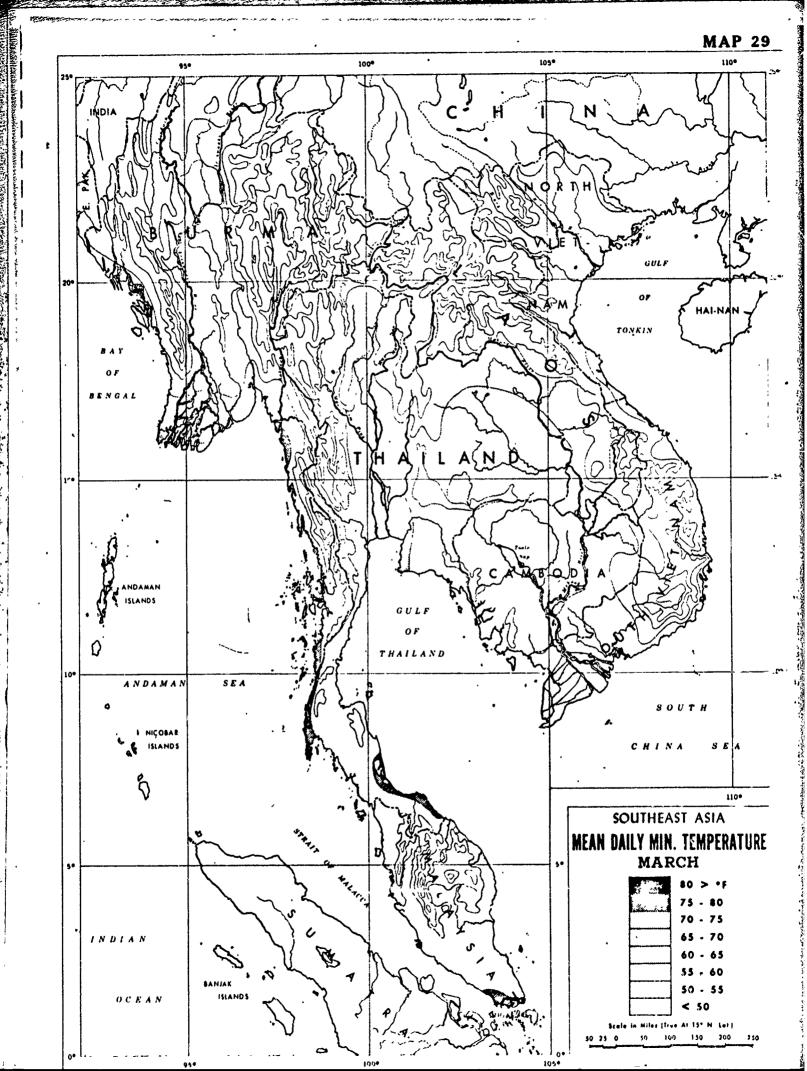


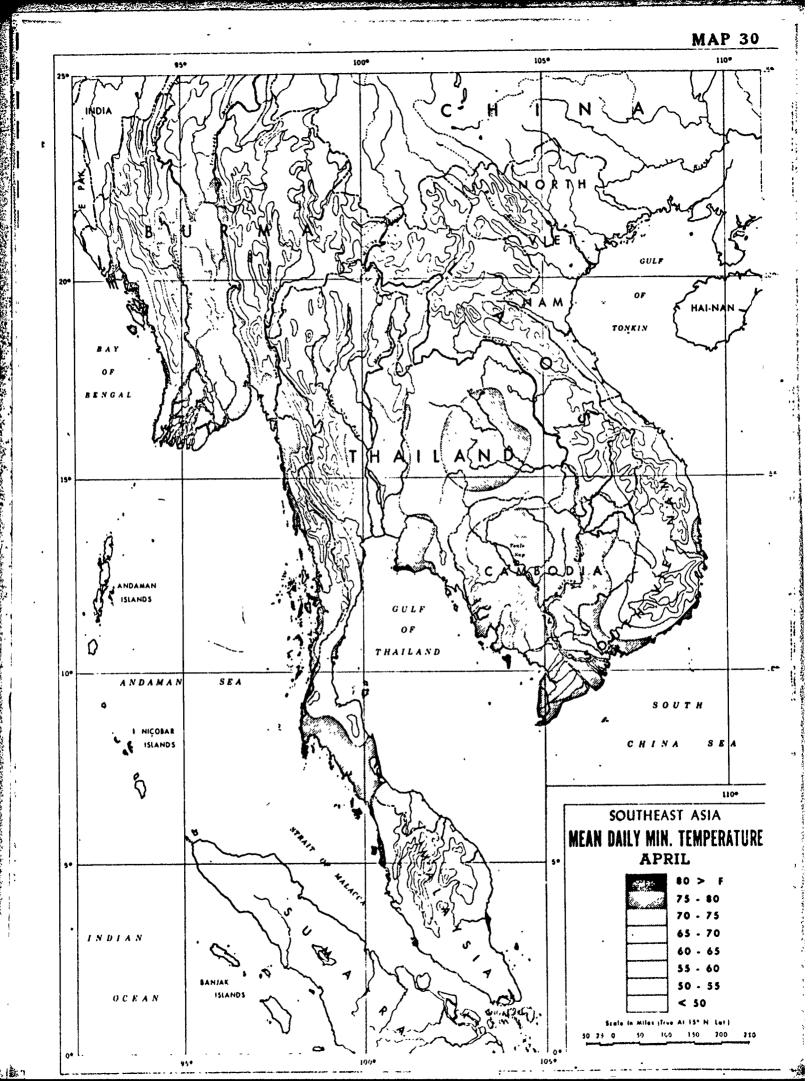


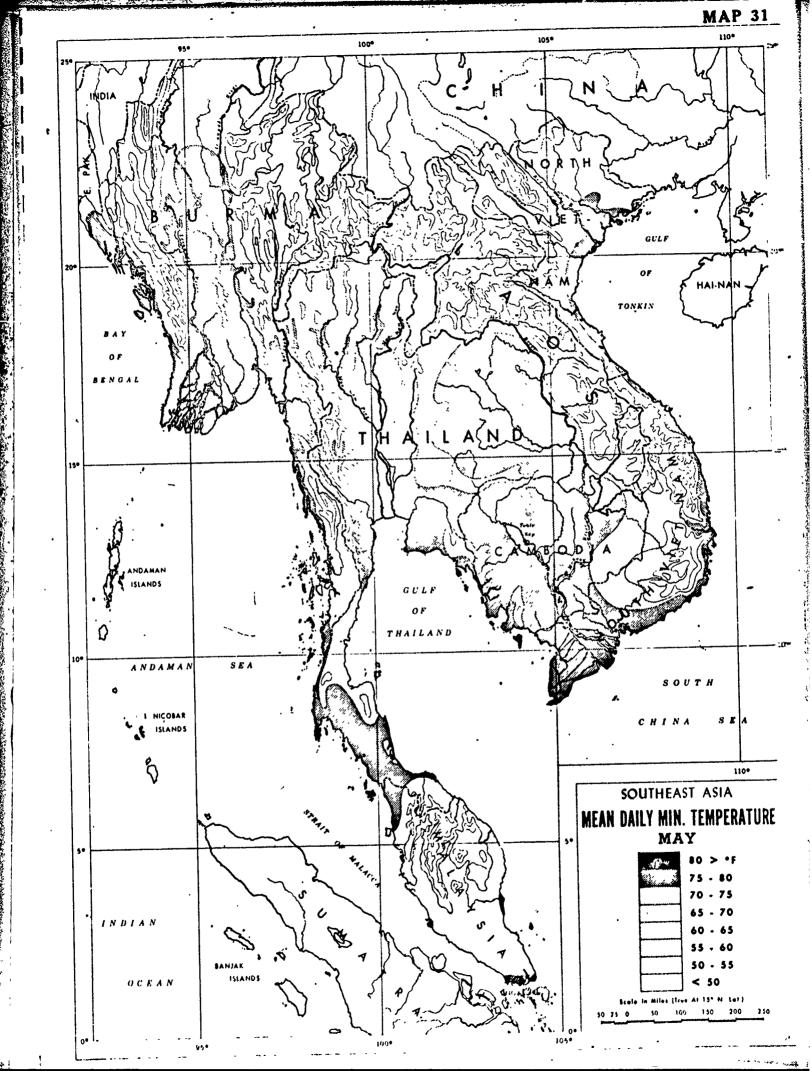
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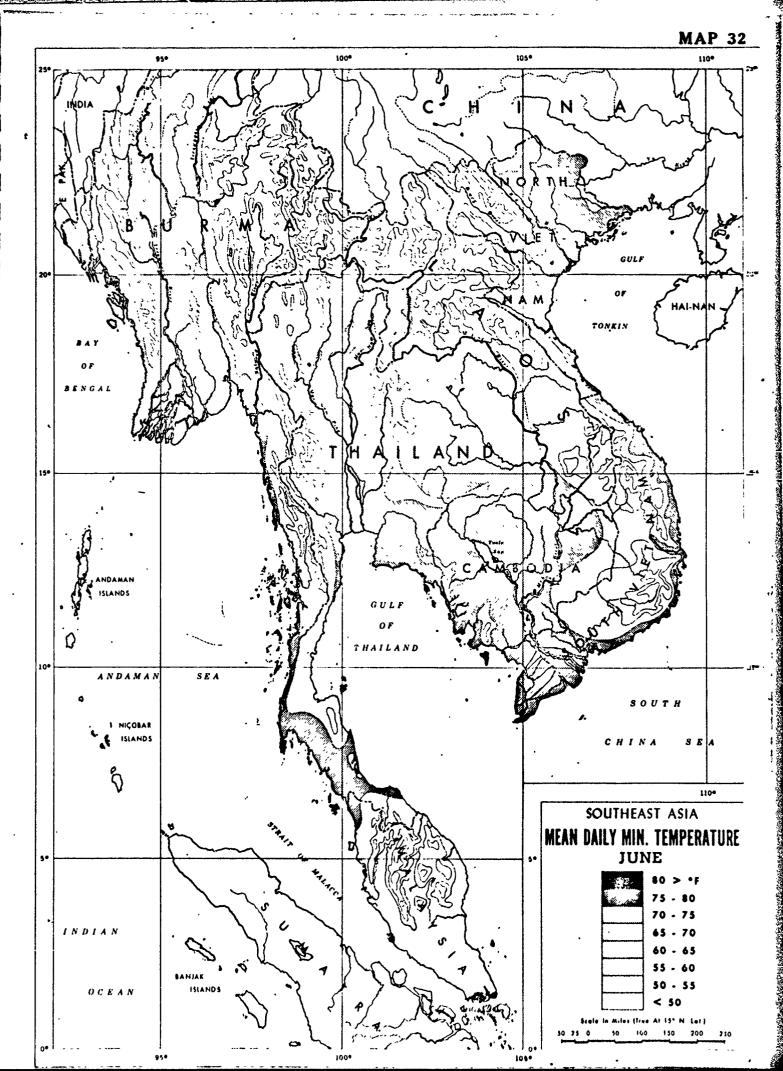




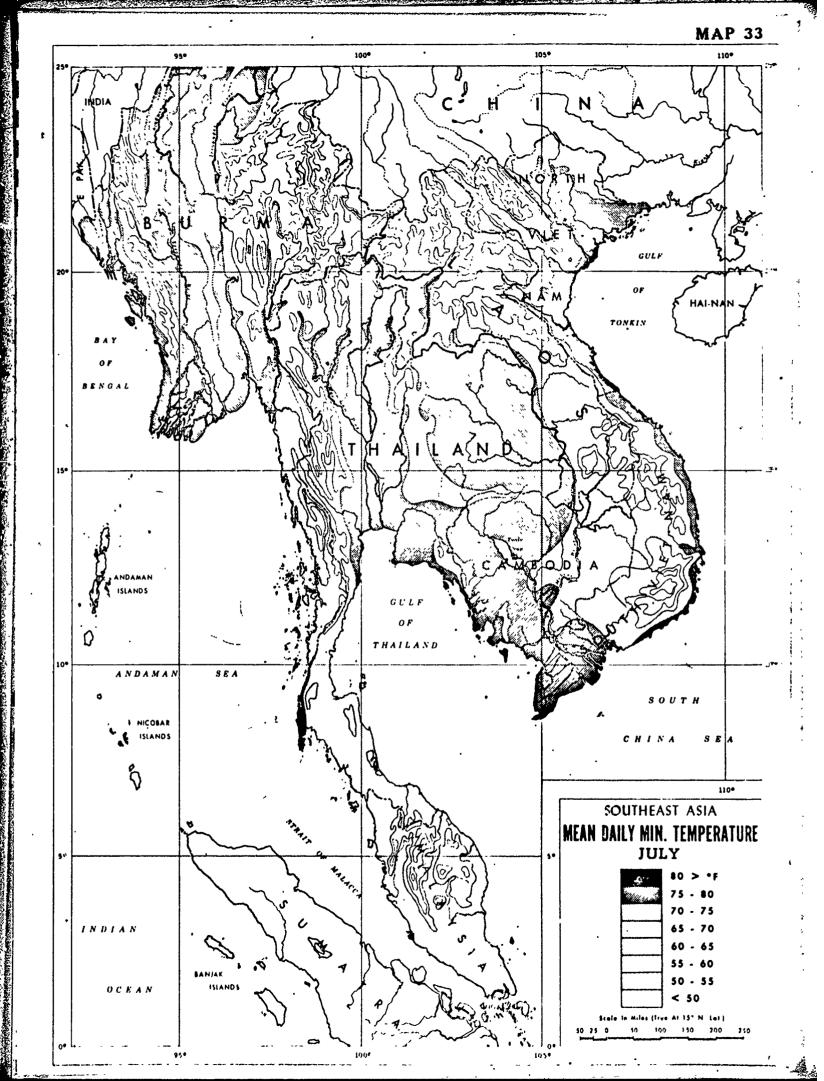


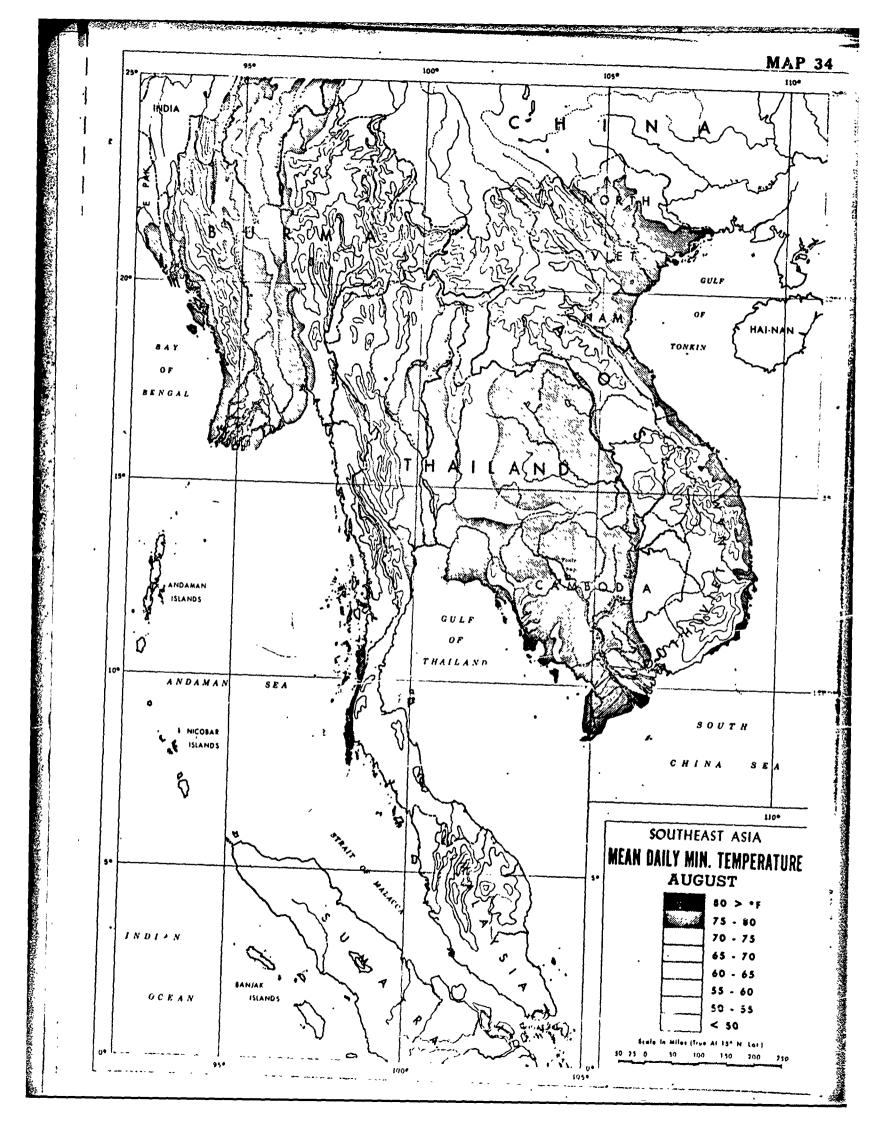


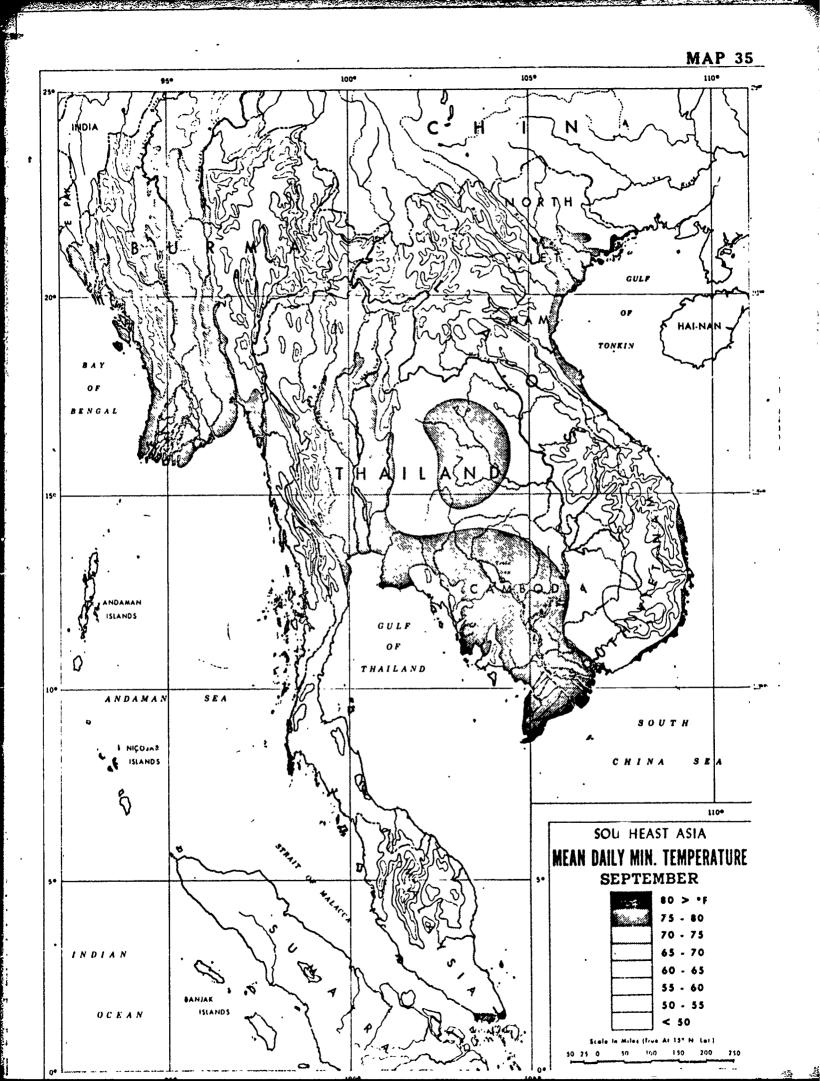


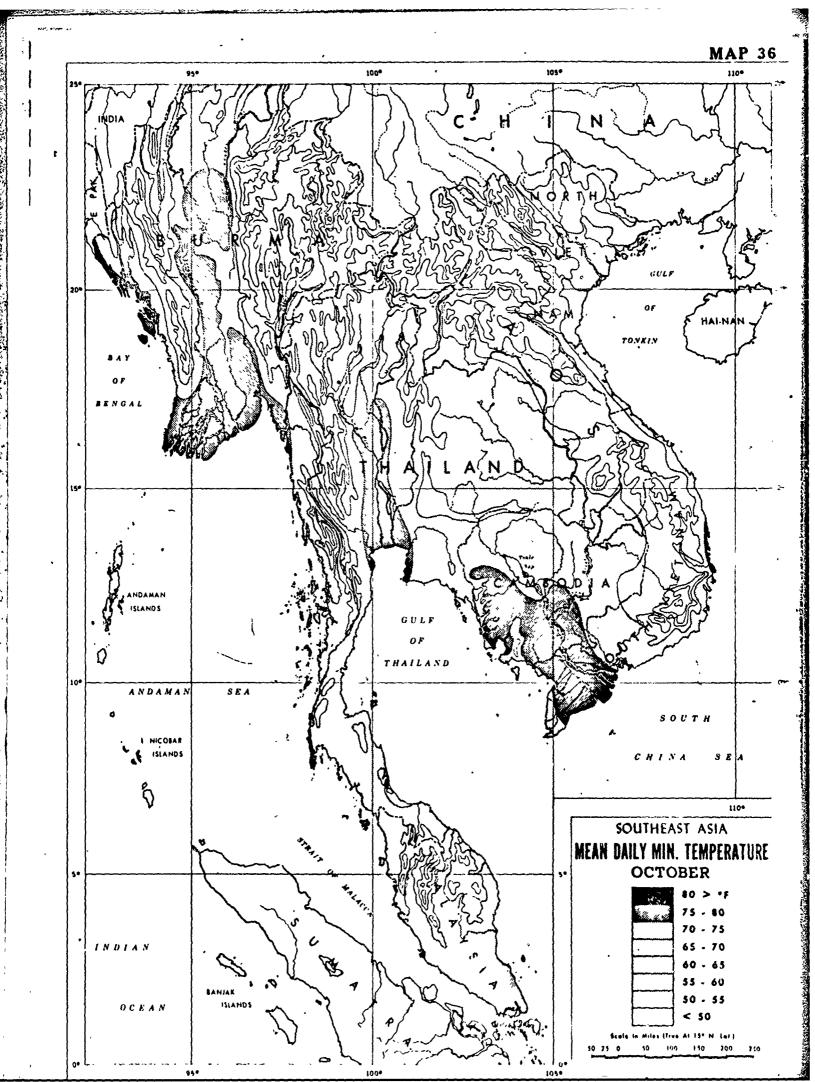


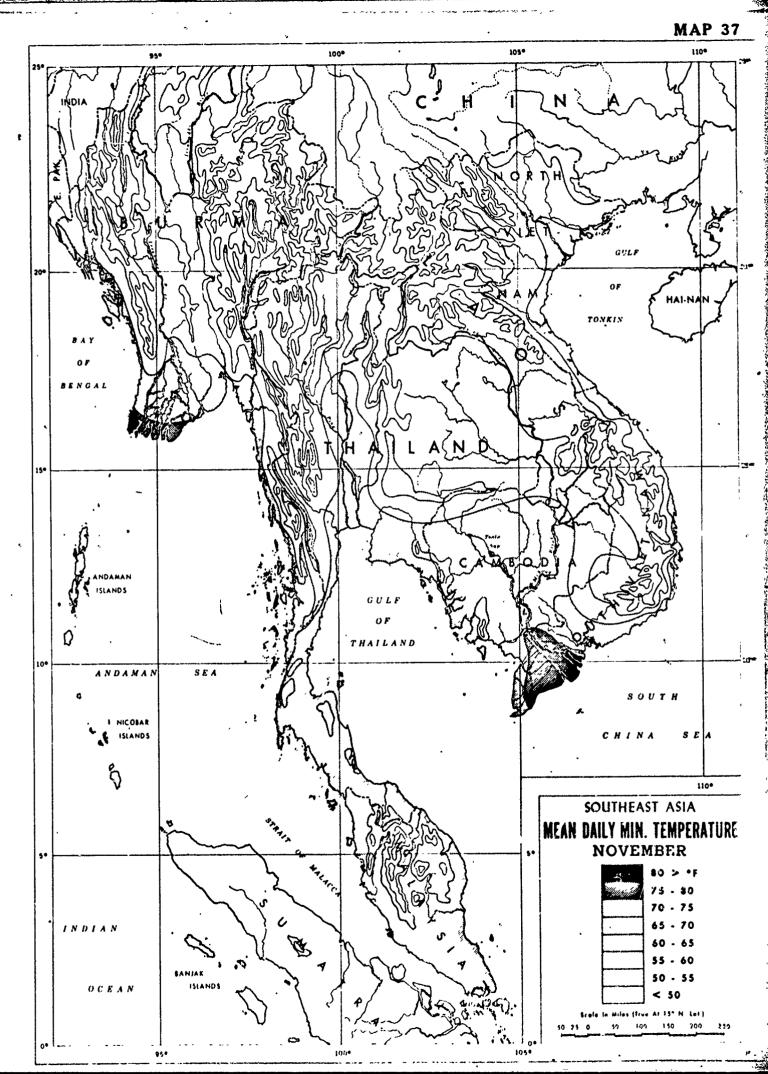
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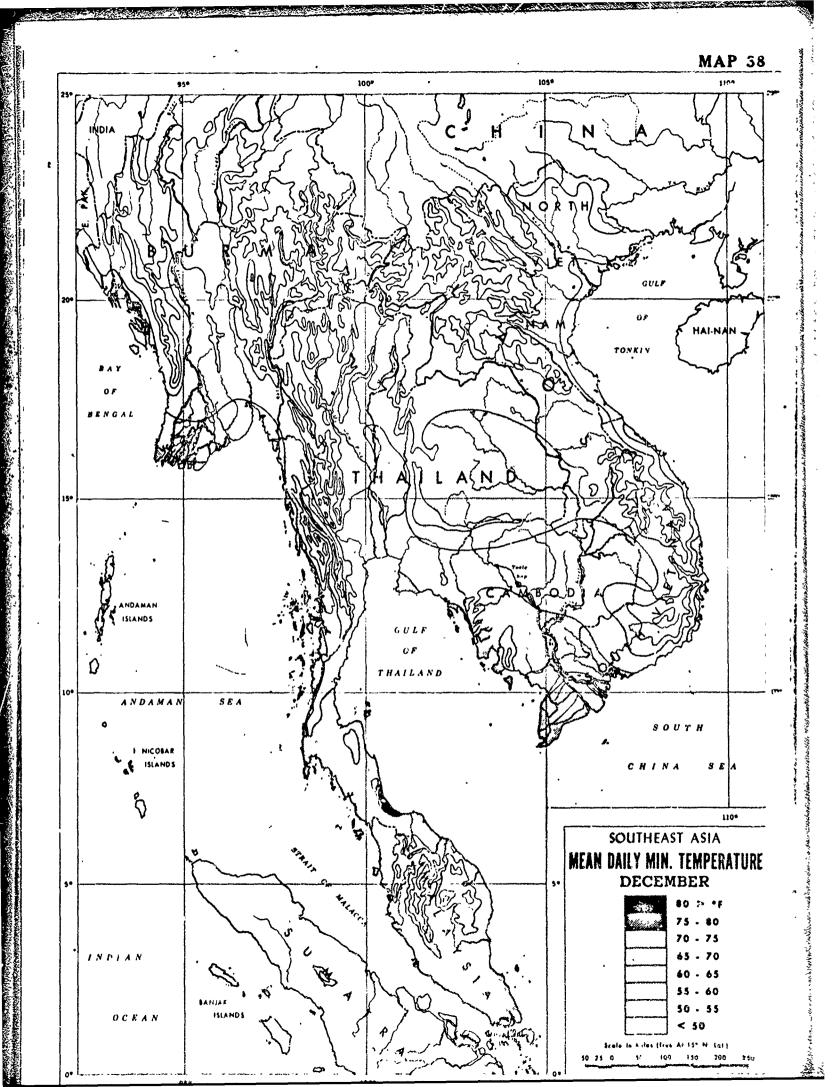




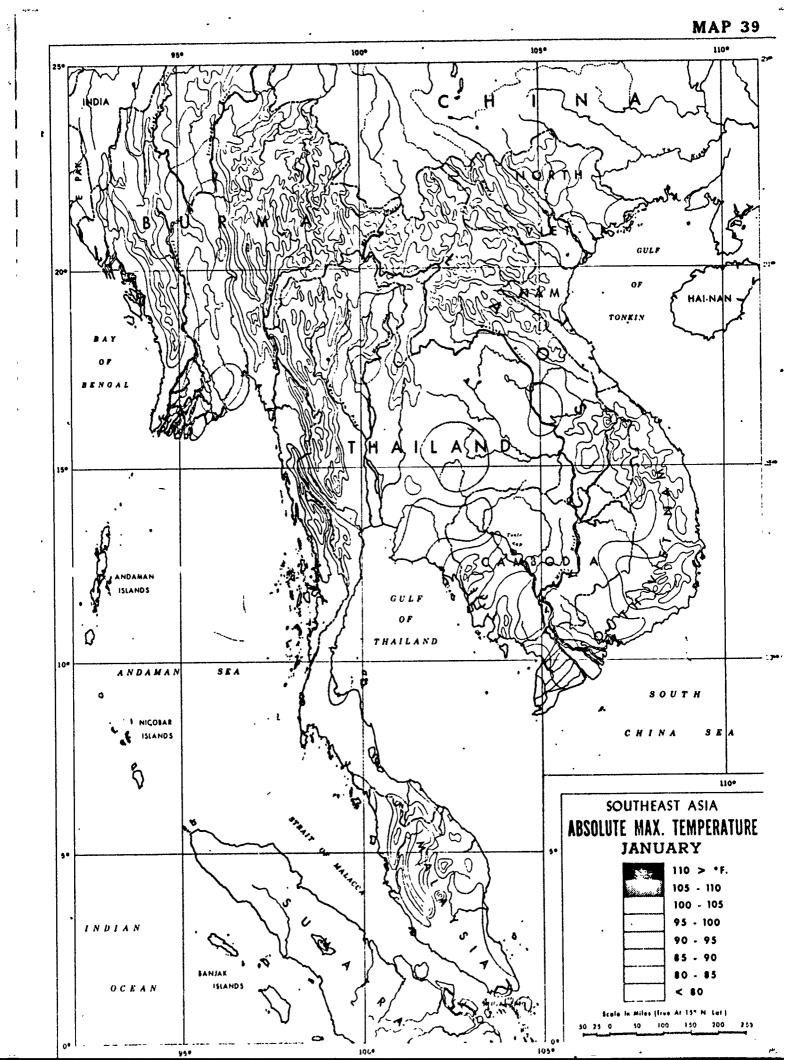


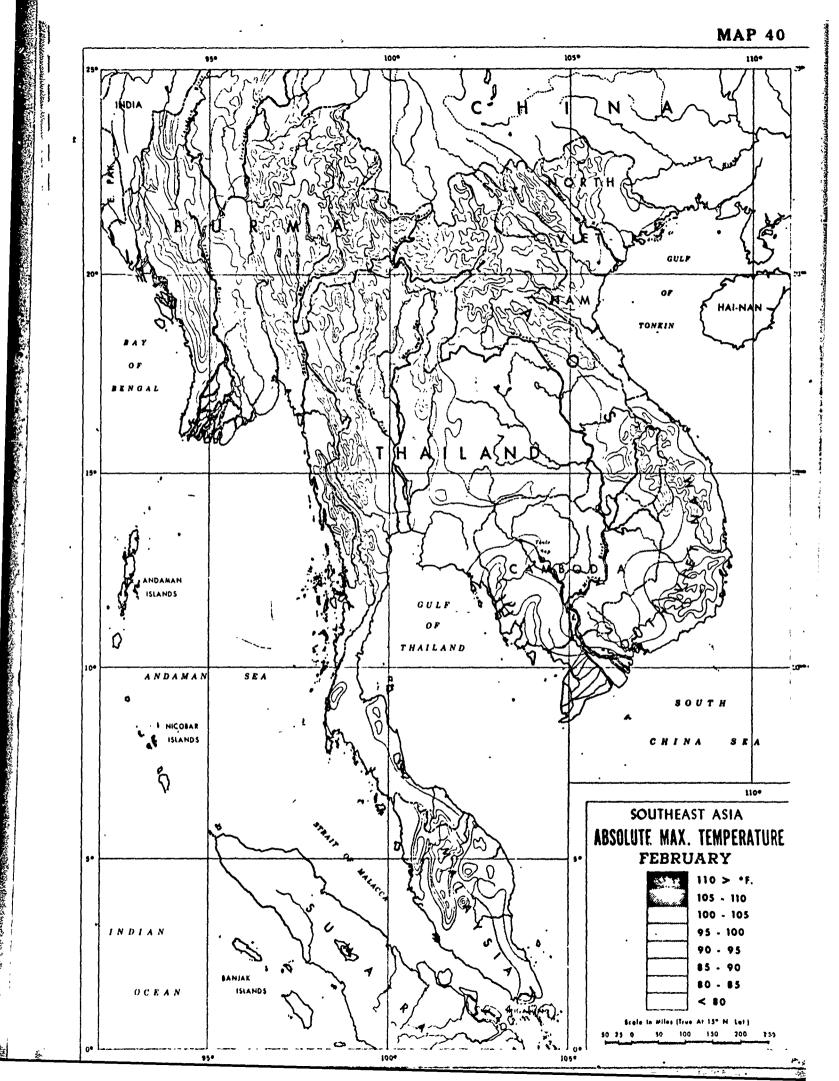


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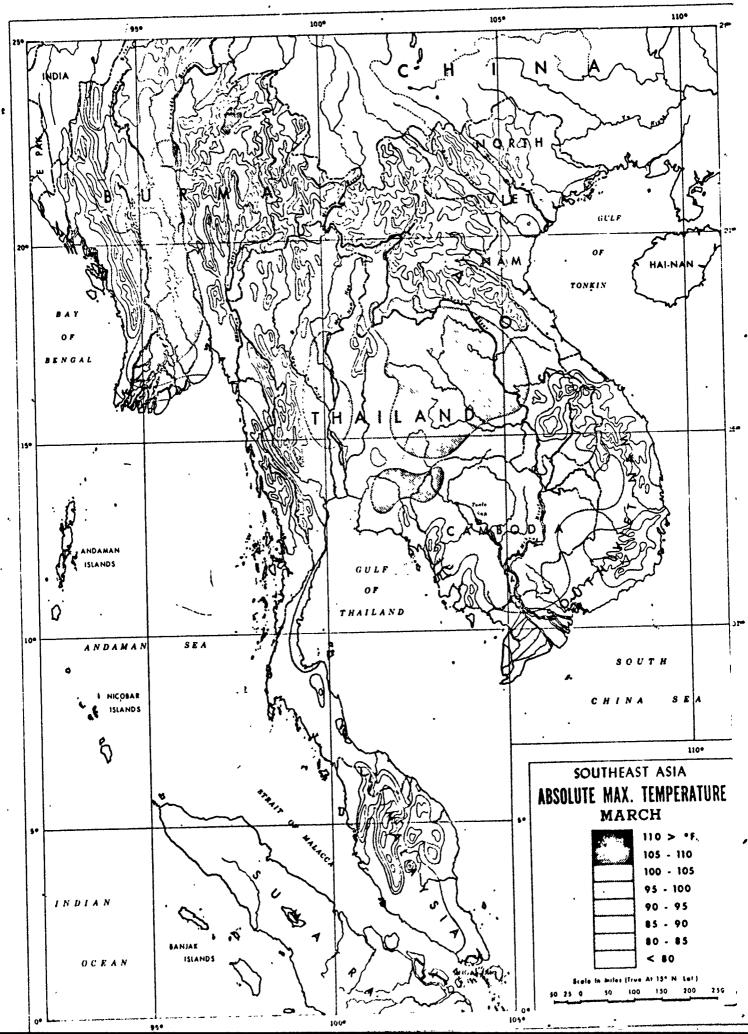


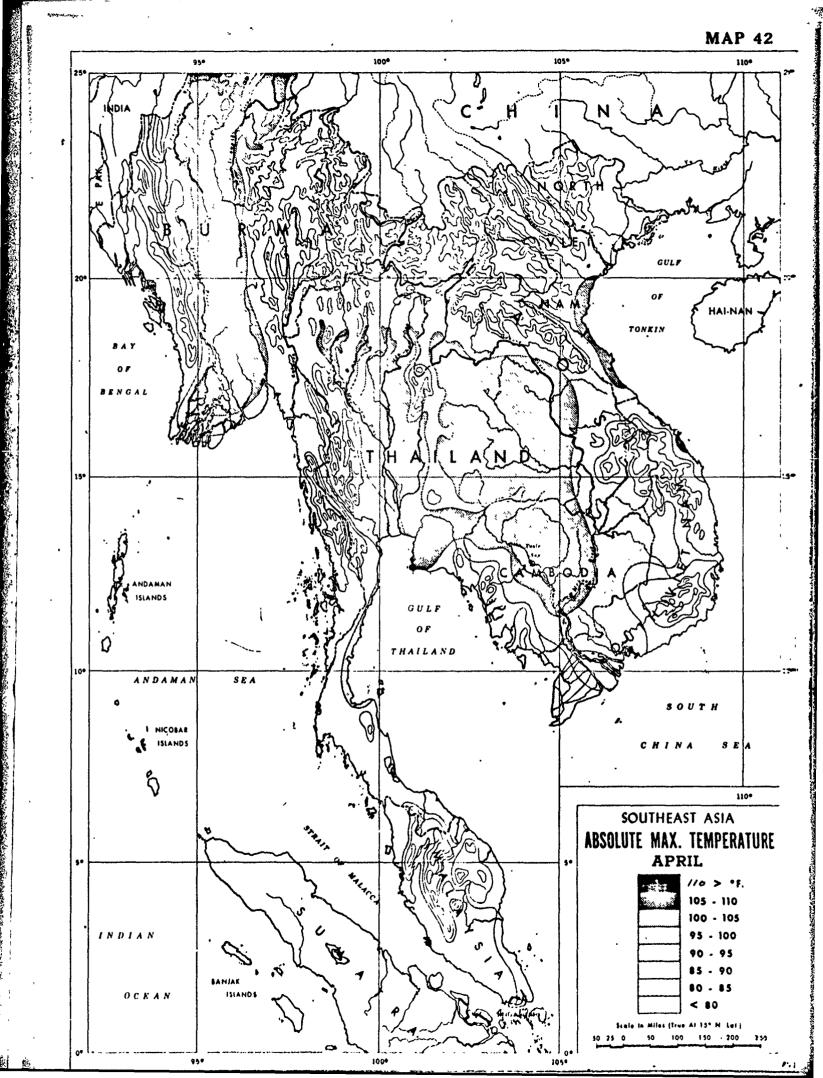
ABSOLUTE MAXIMUM TEMPERATURE



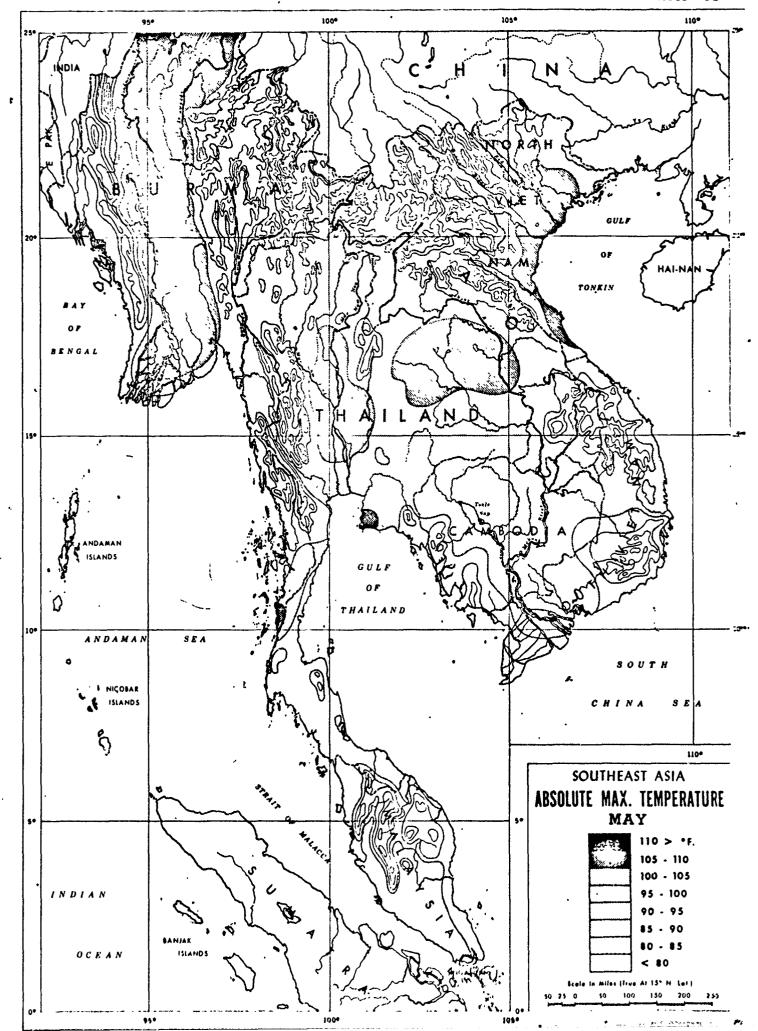


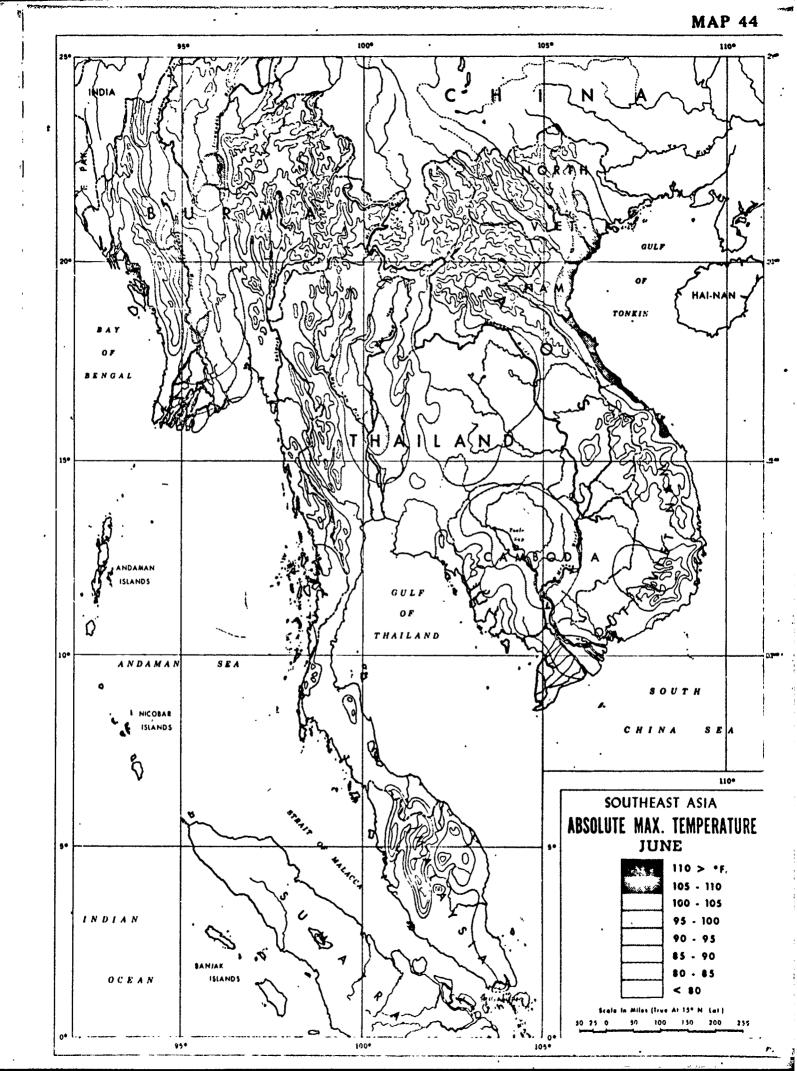


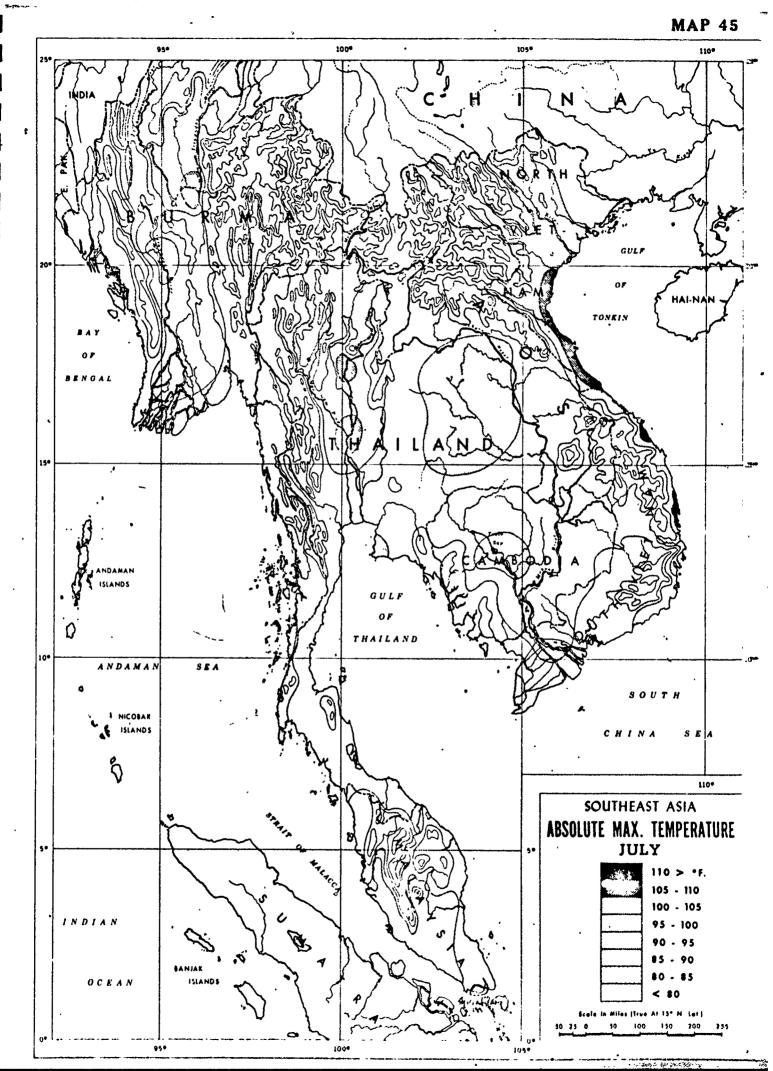




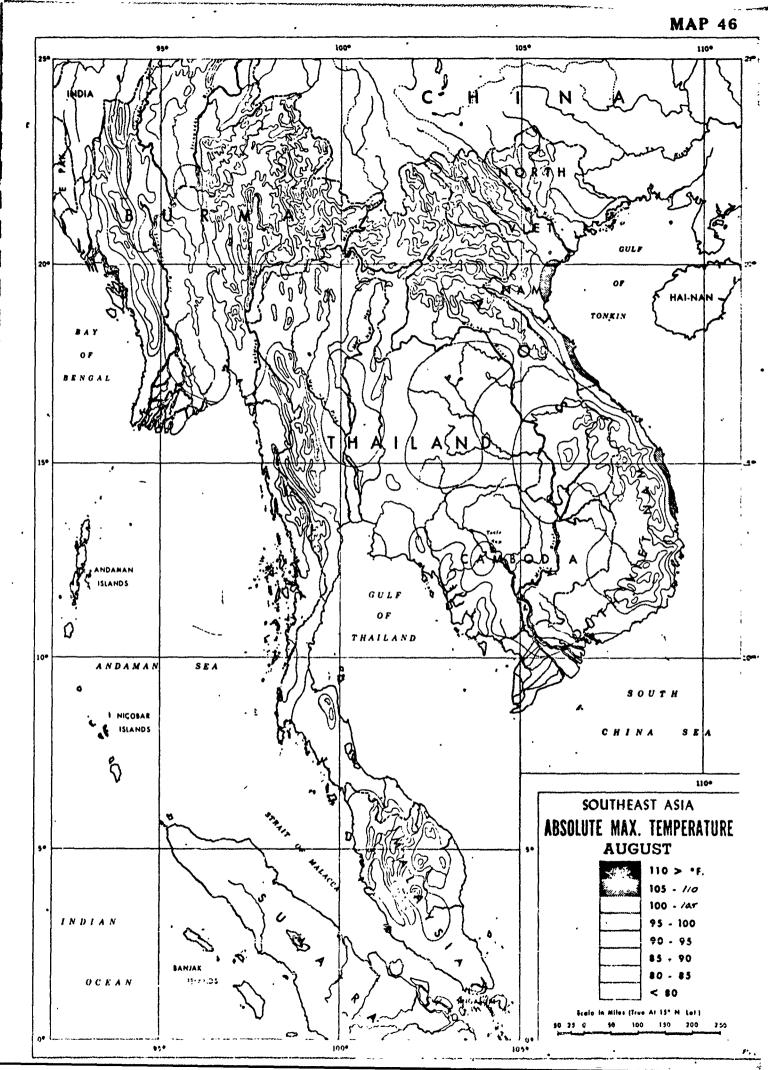




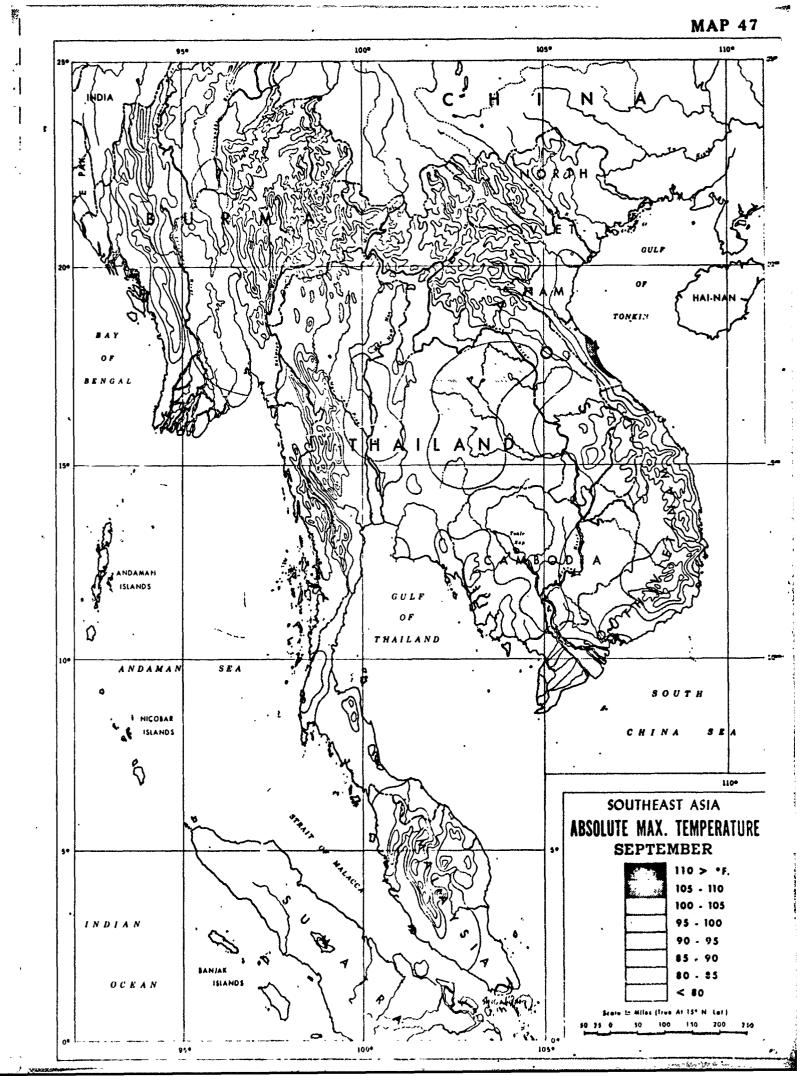




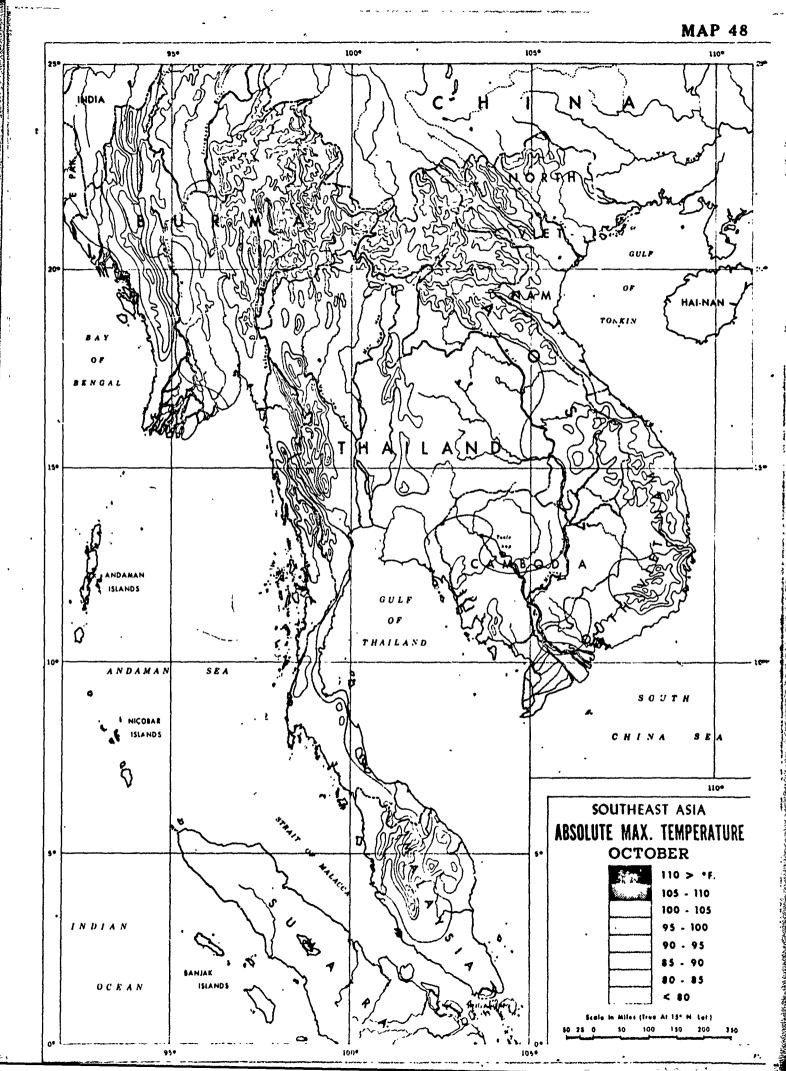
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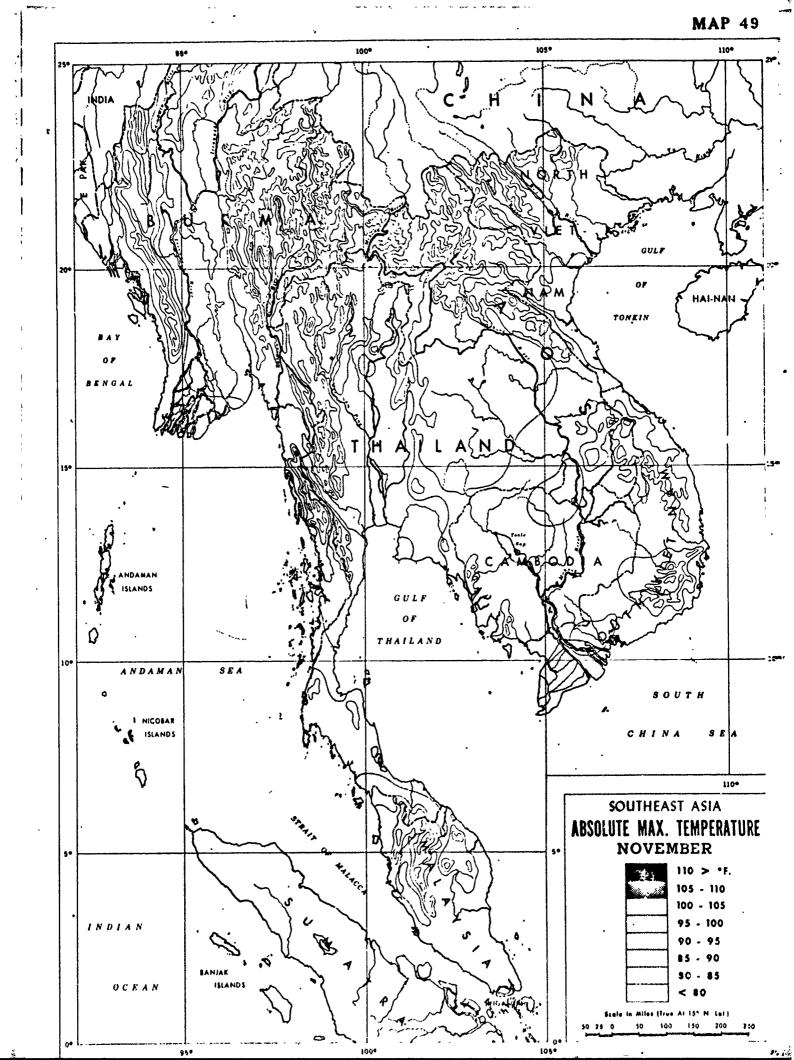


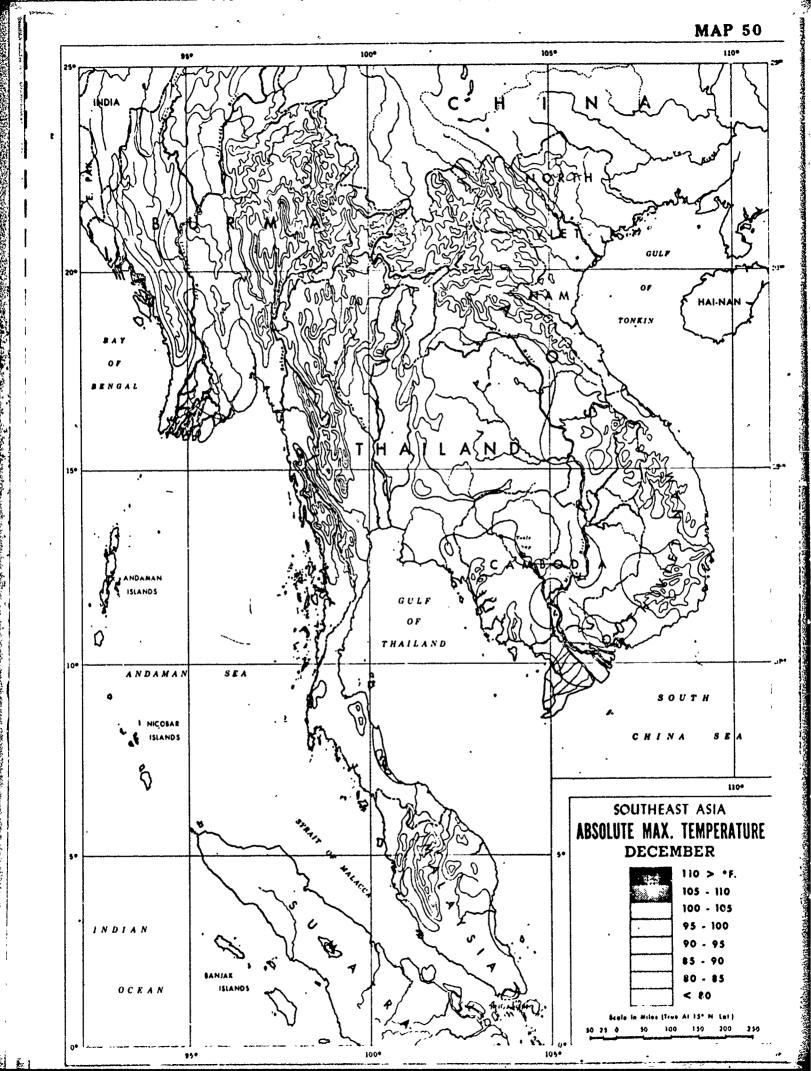
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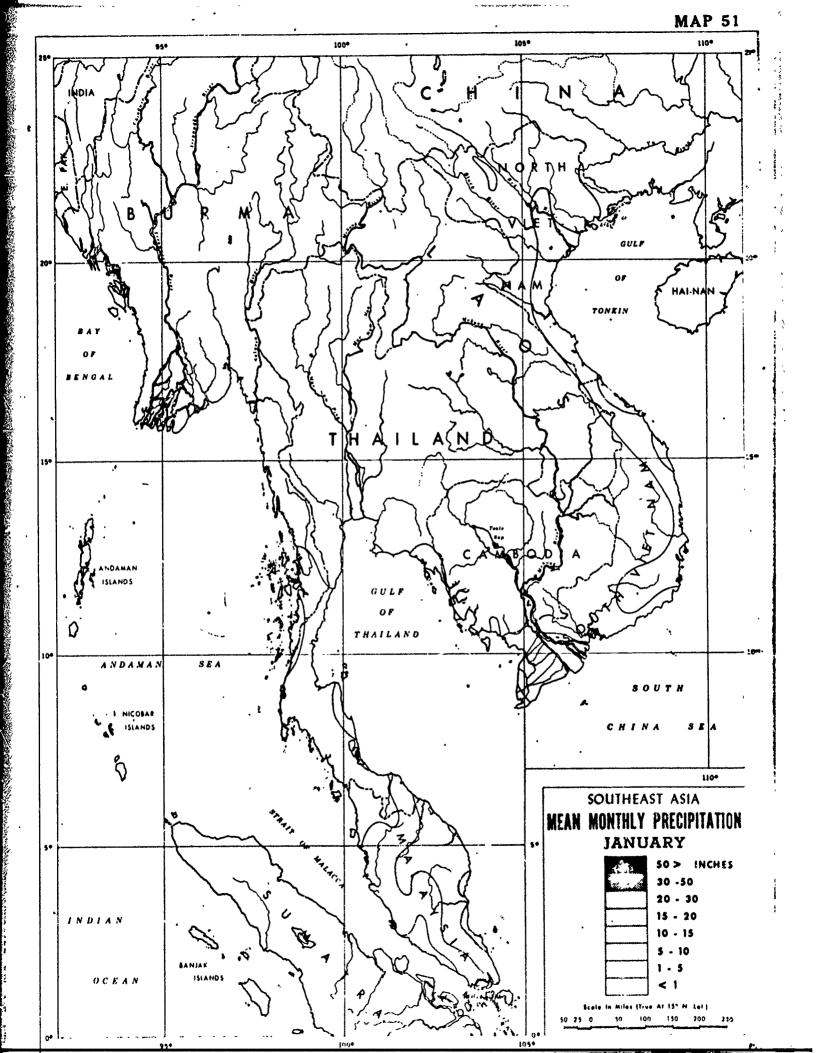
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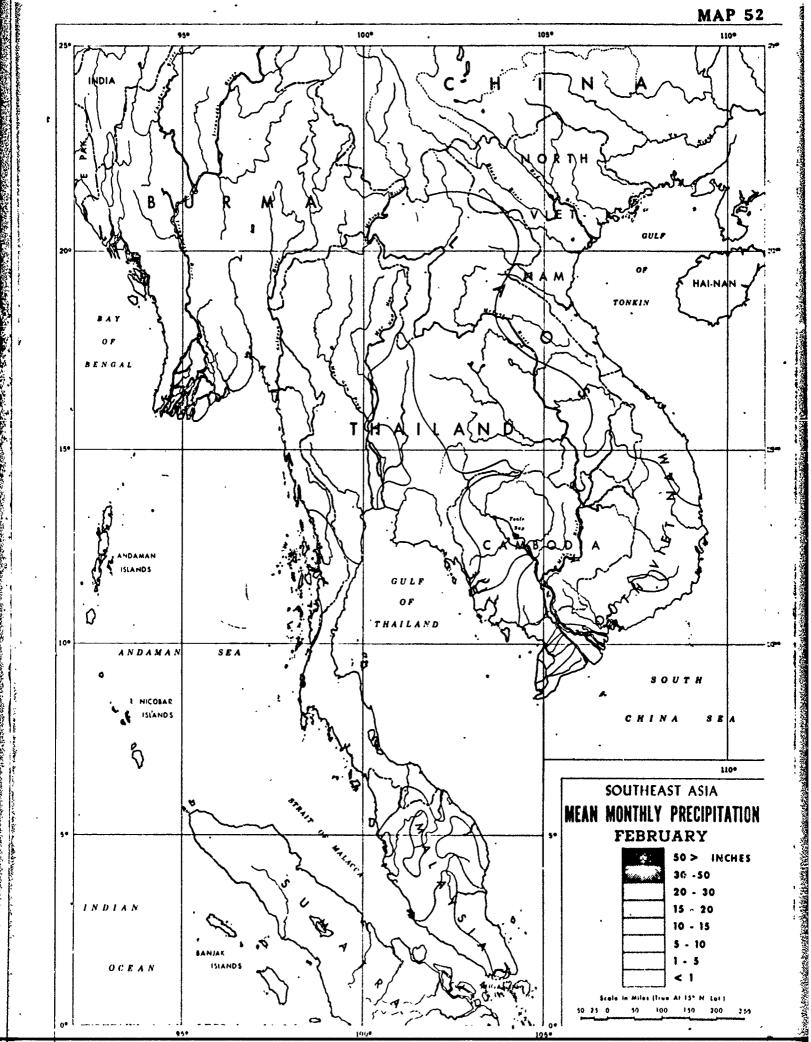


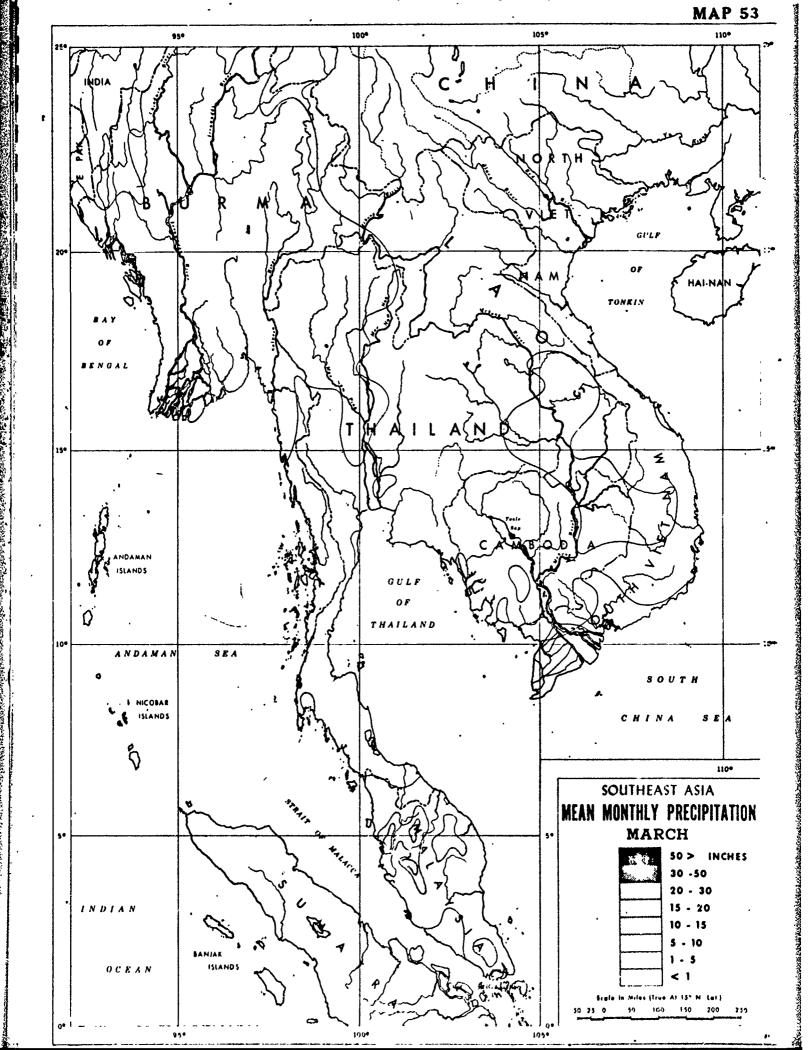


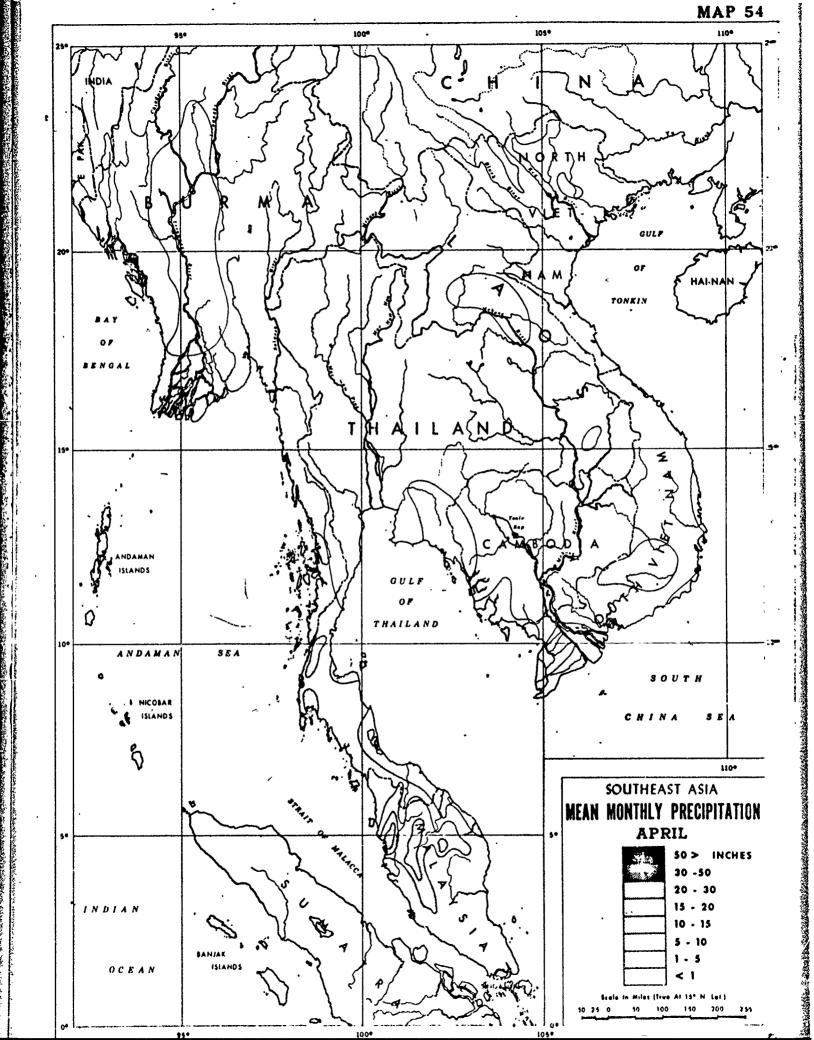


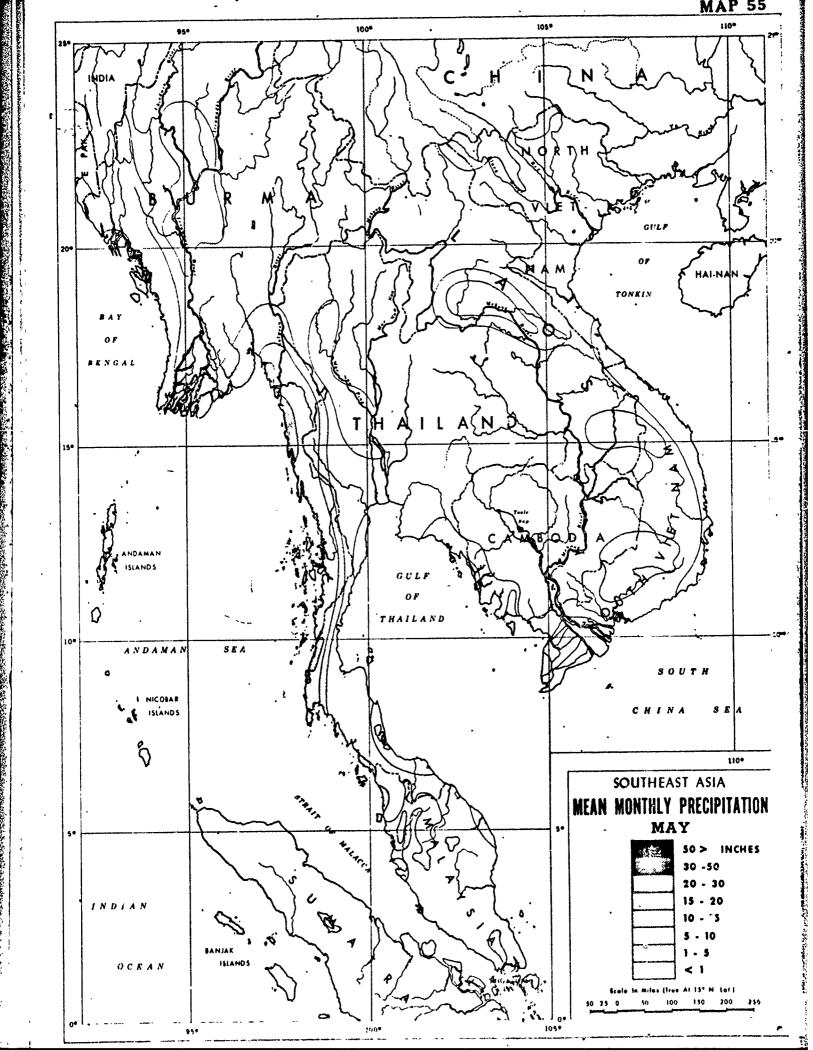
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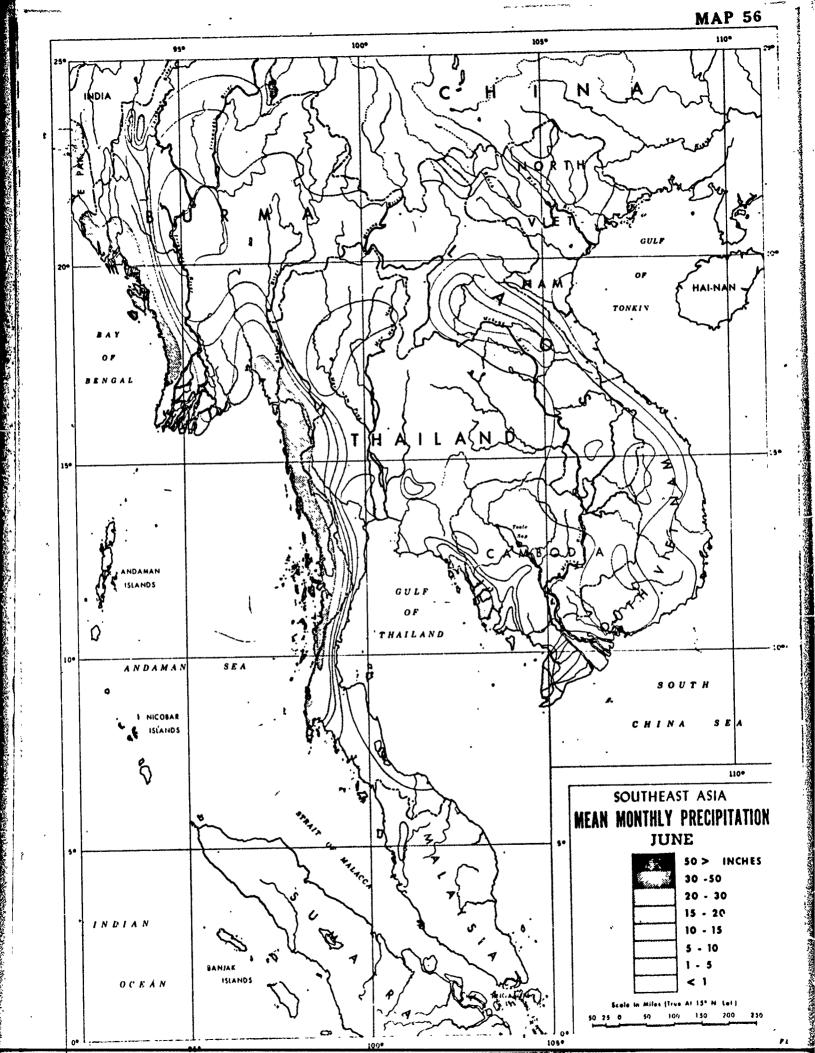


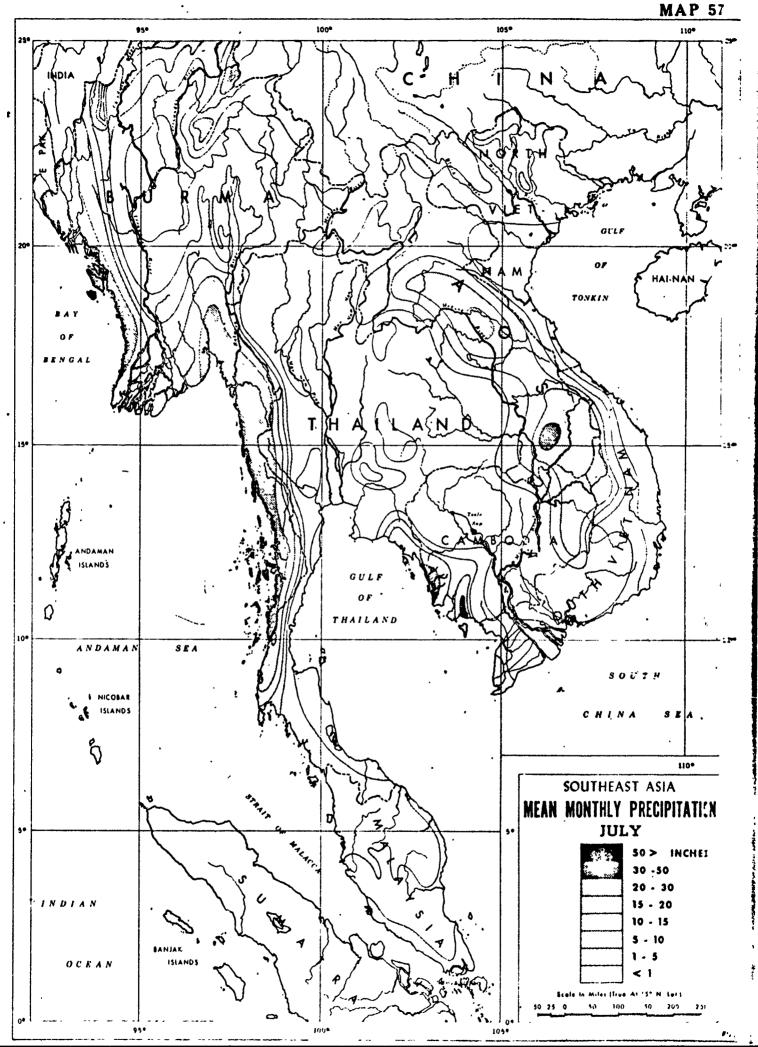


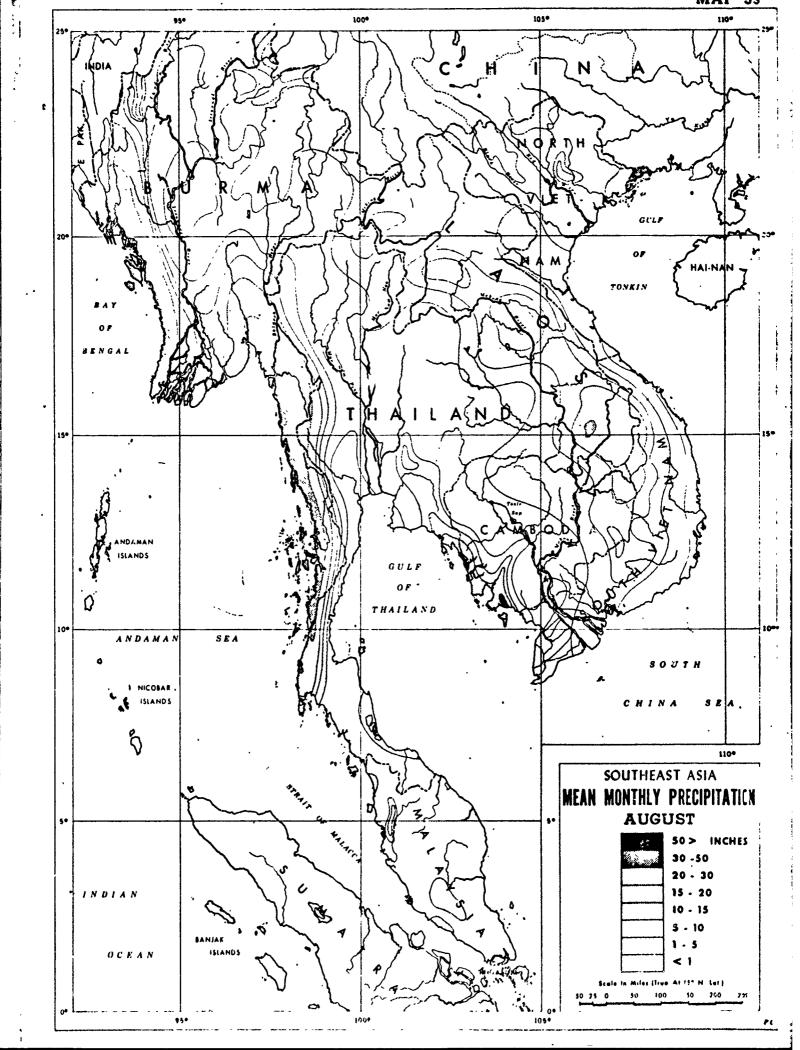


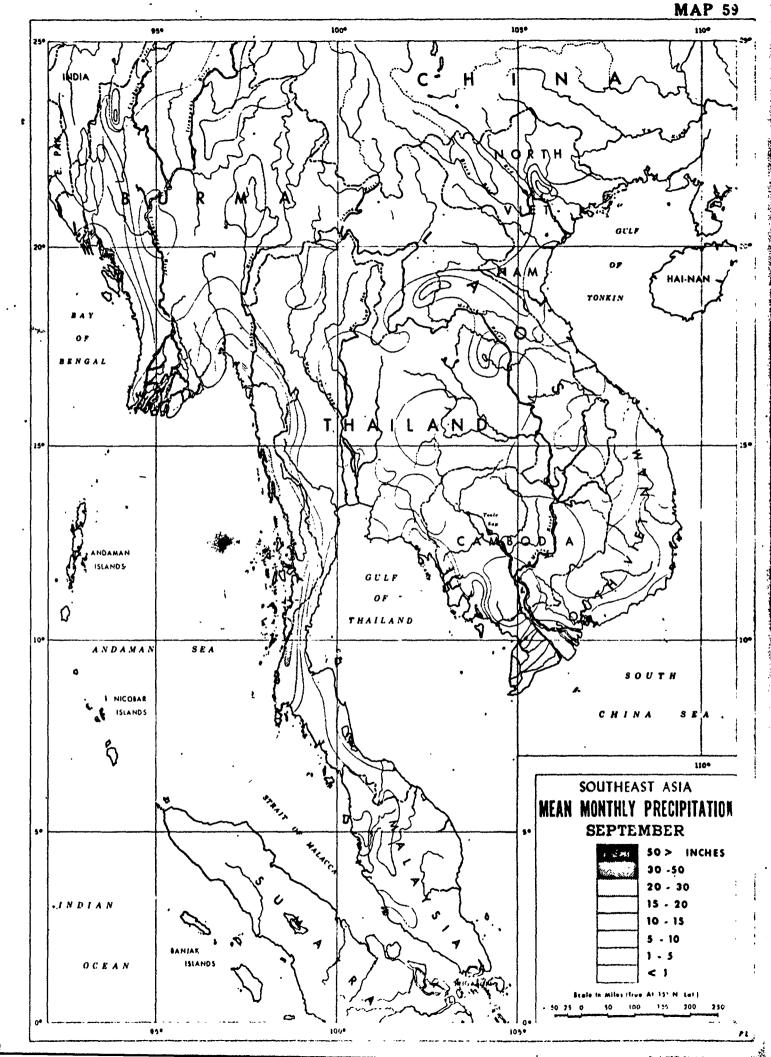


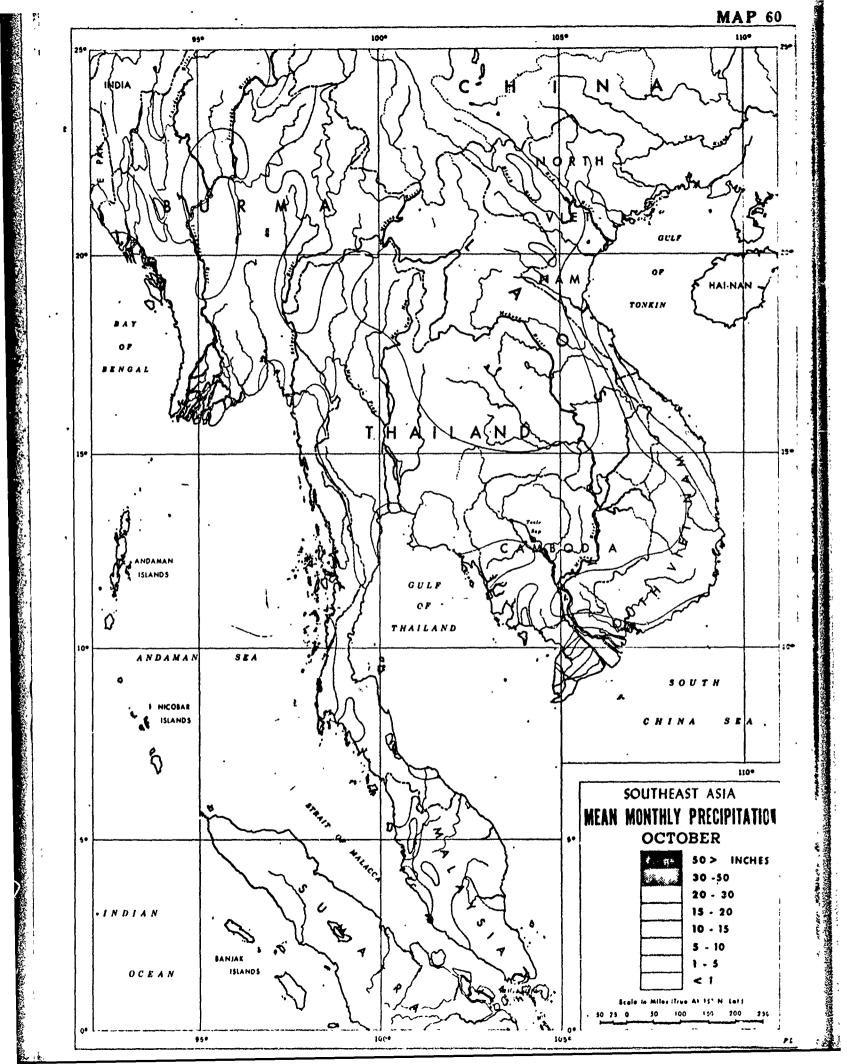


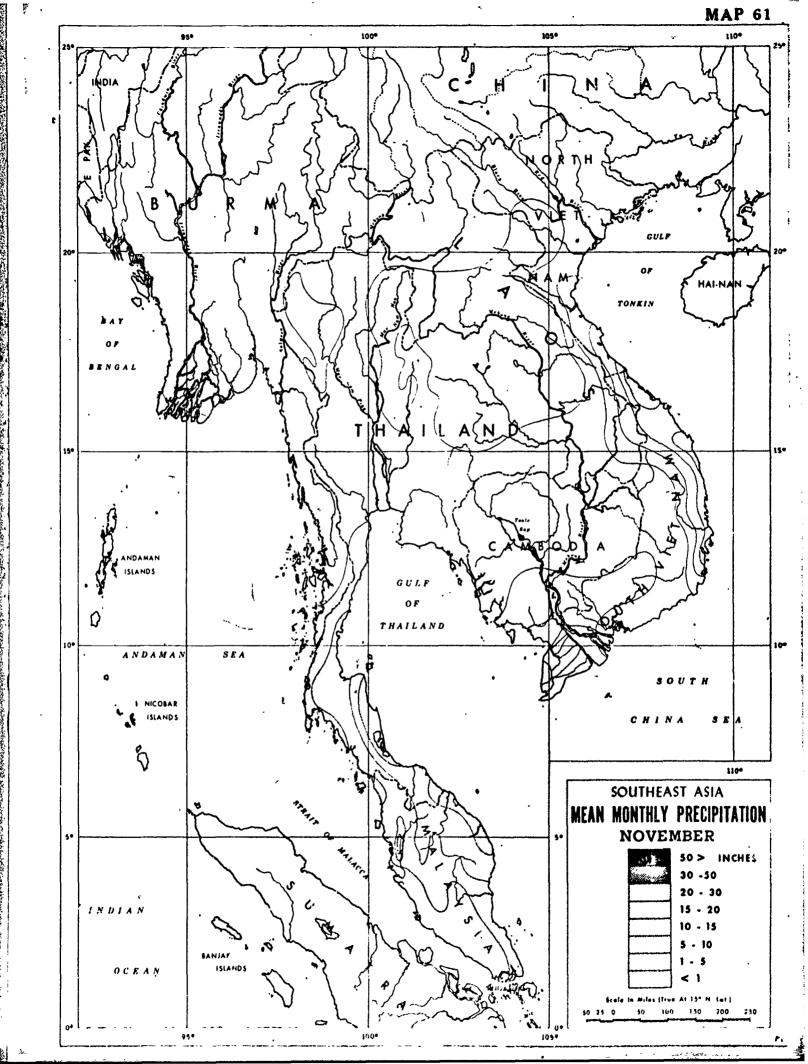


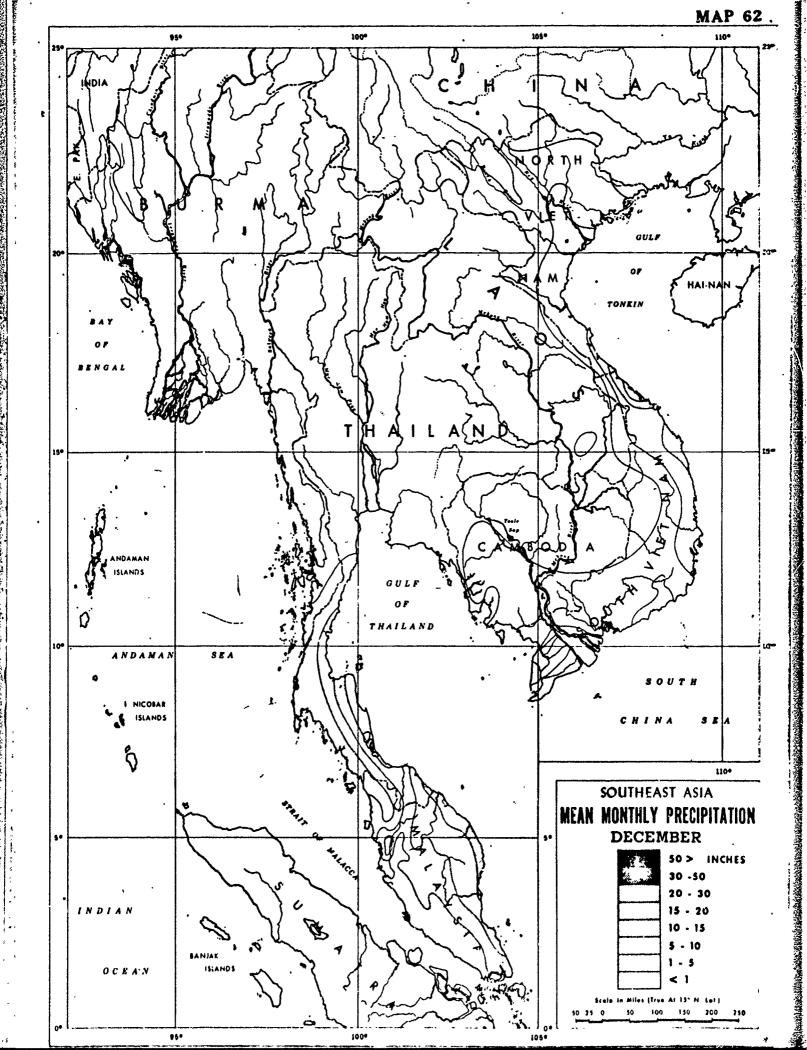




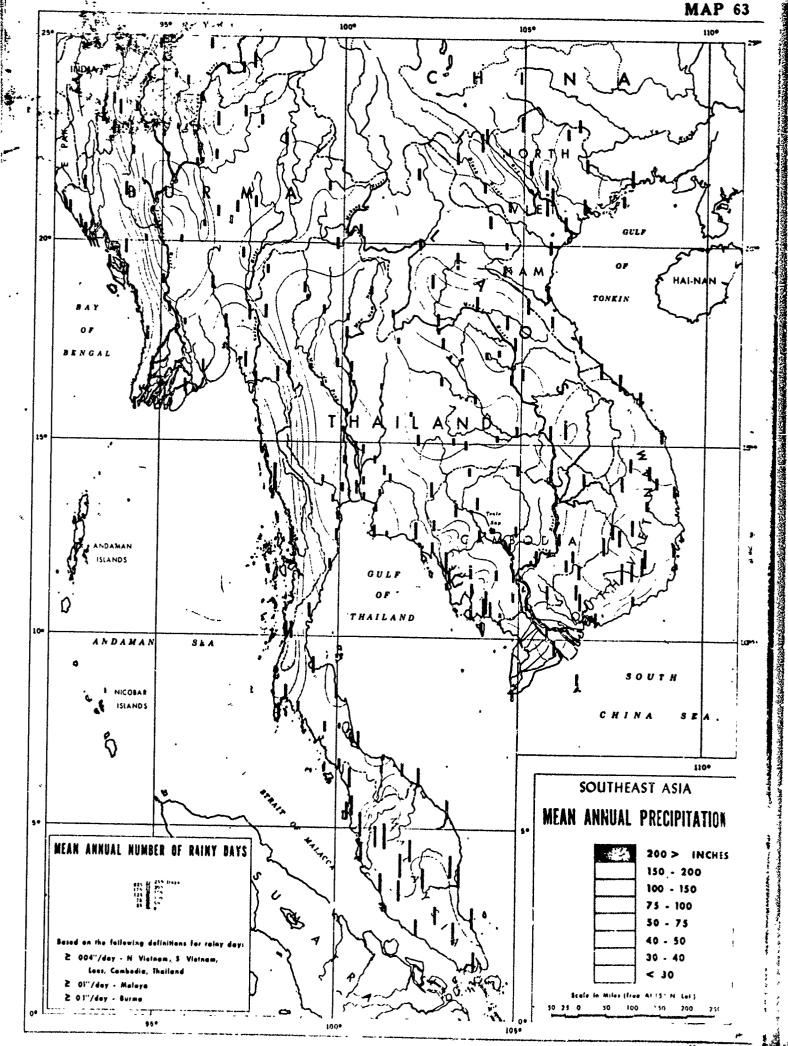








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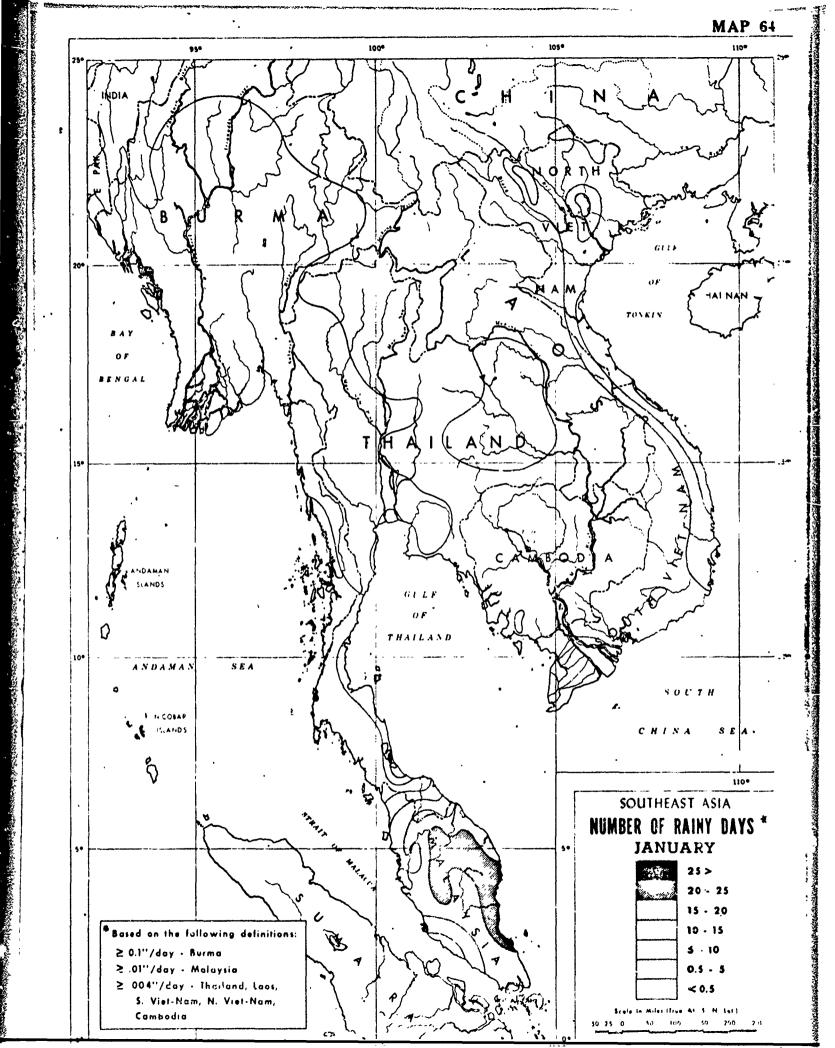


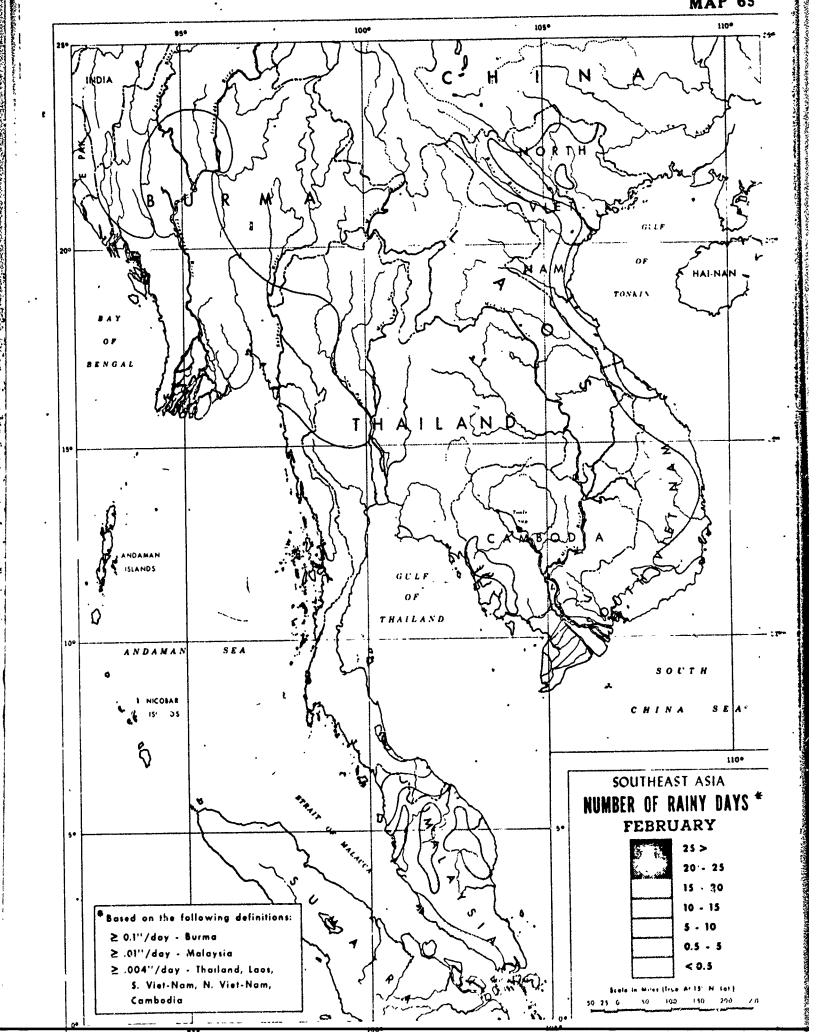
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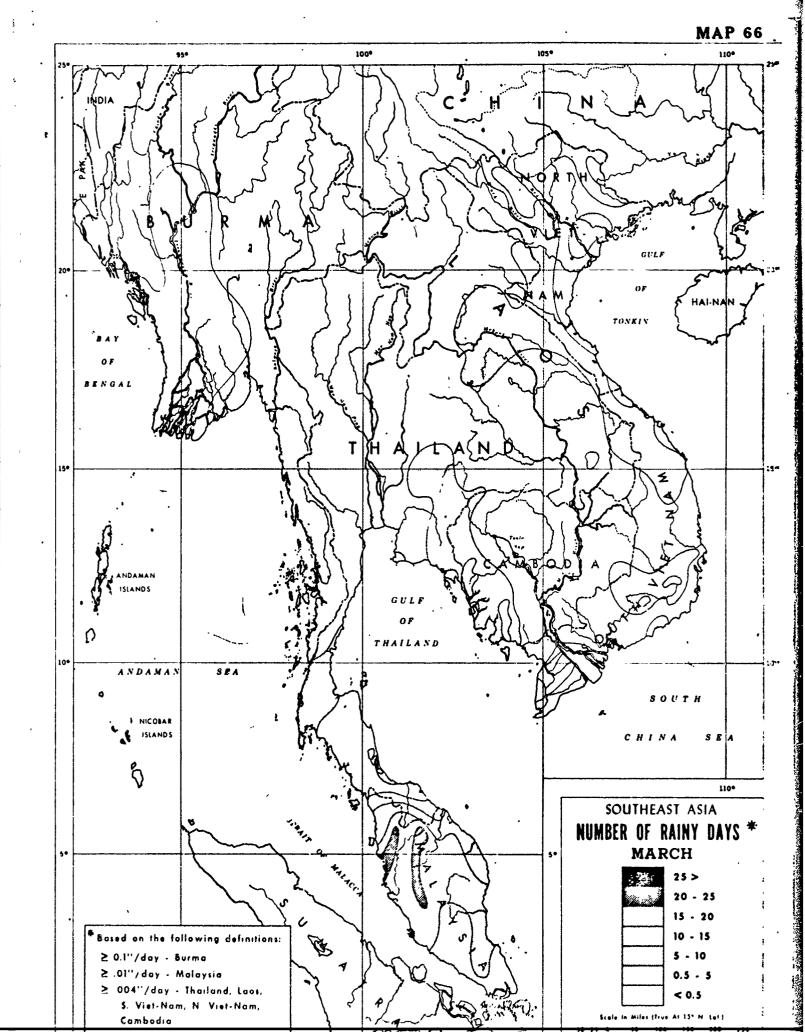


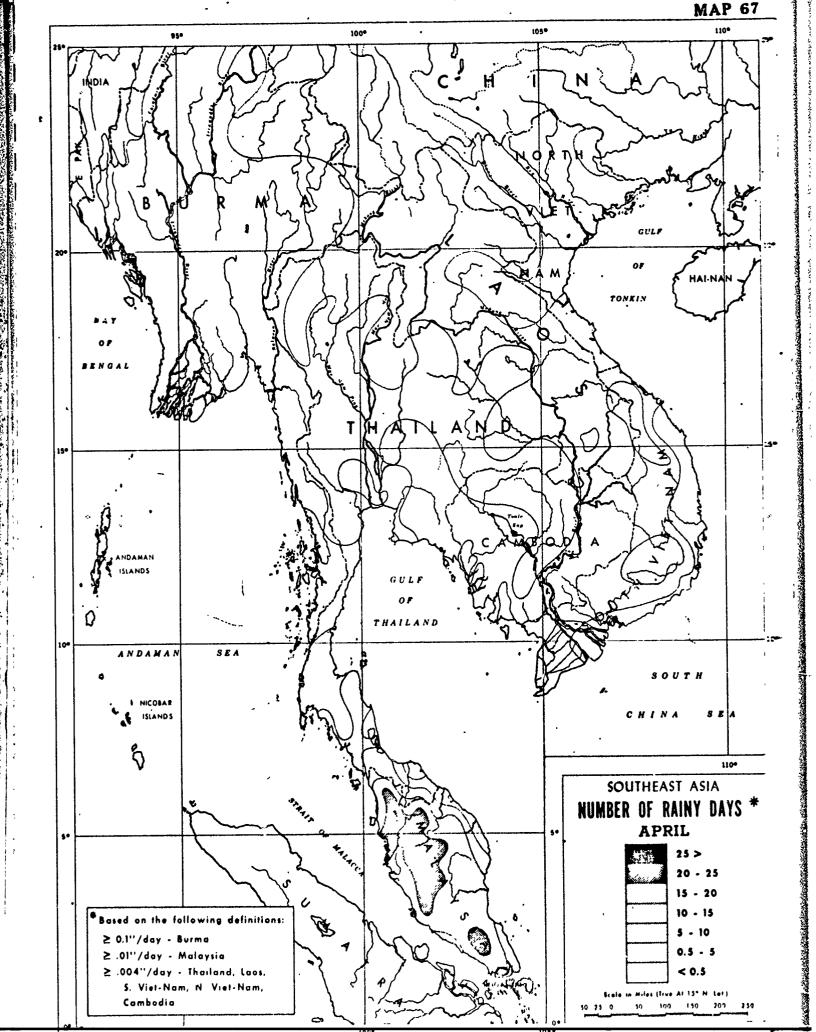
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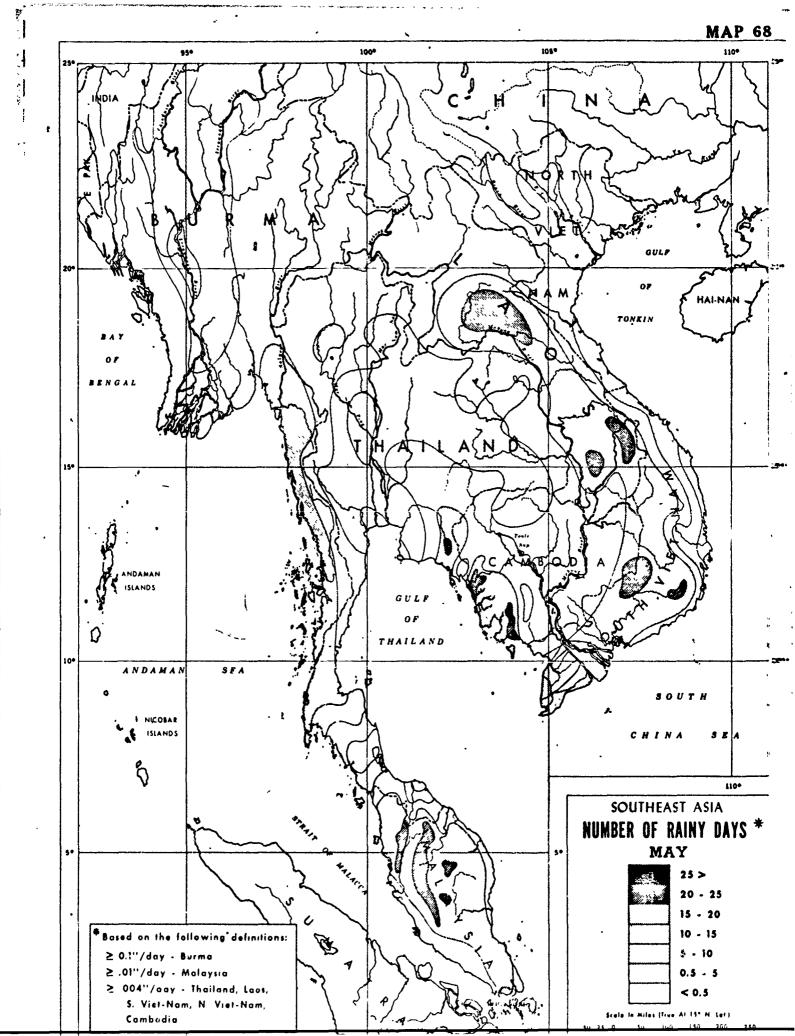
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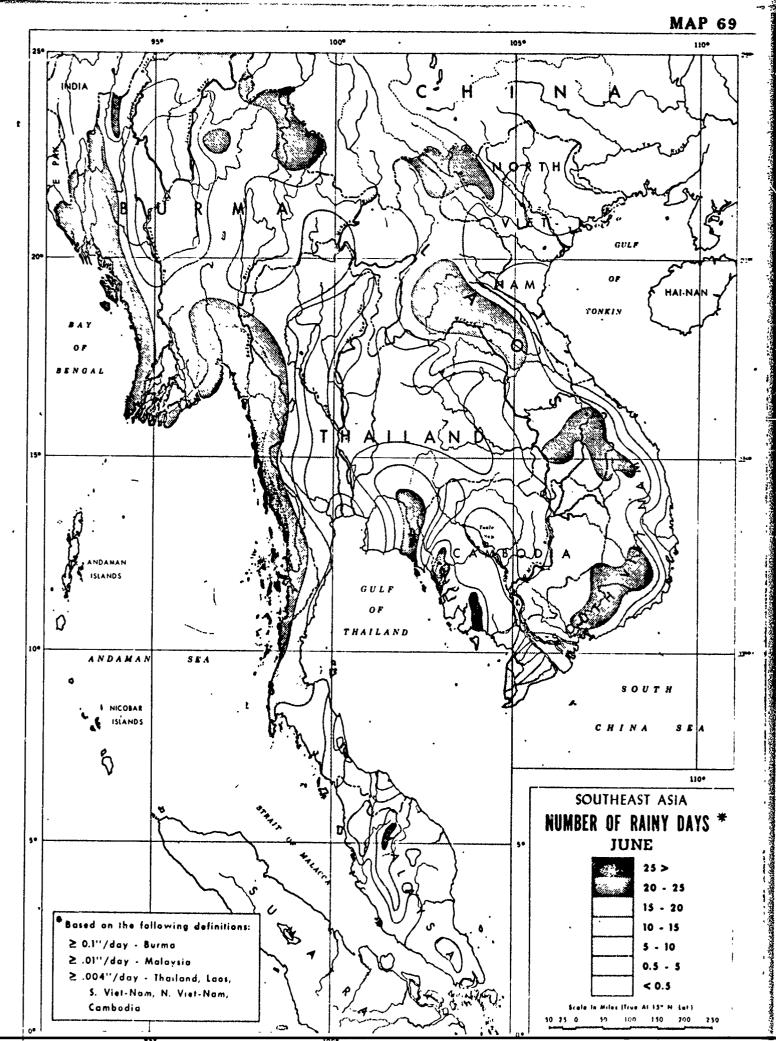


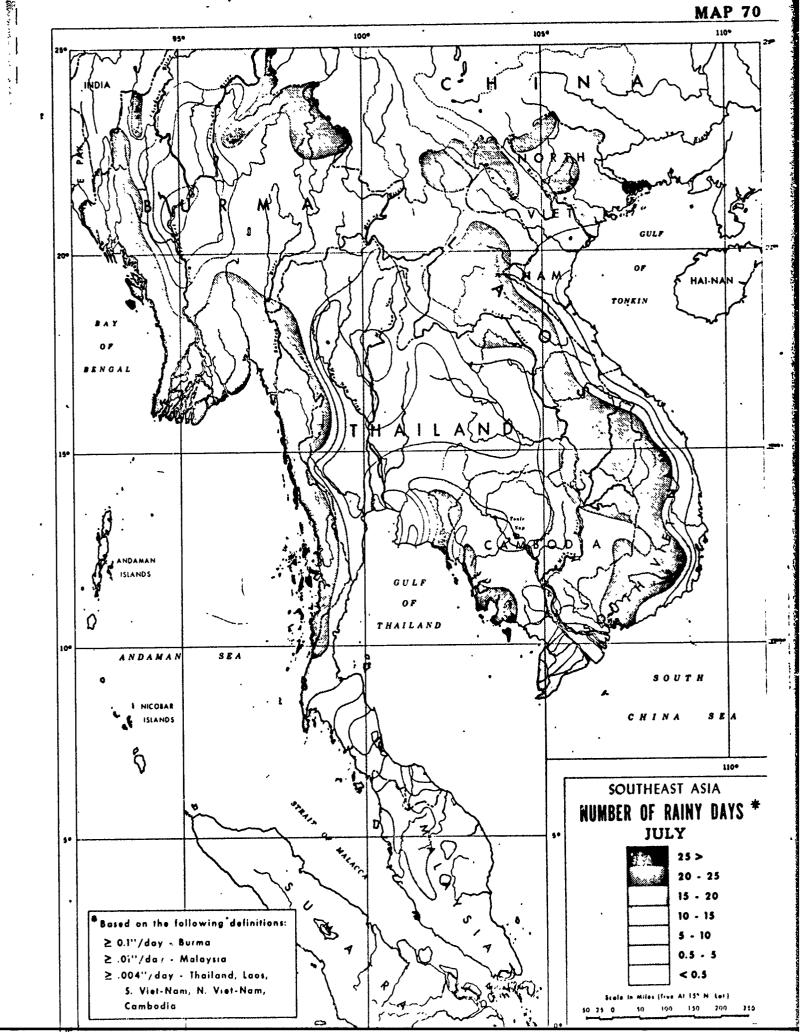


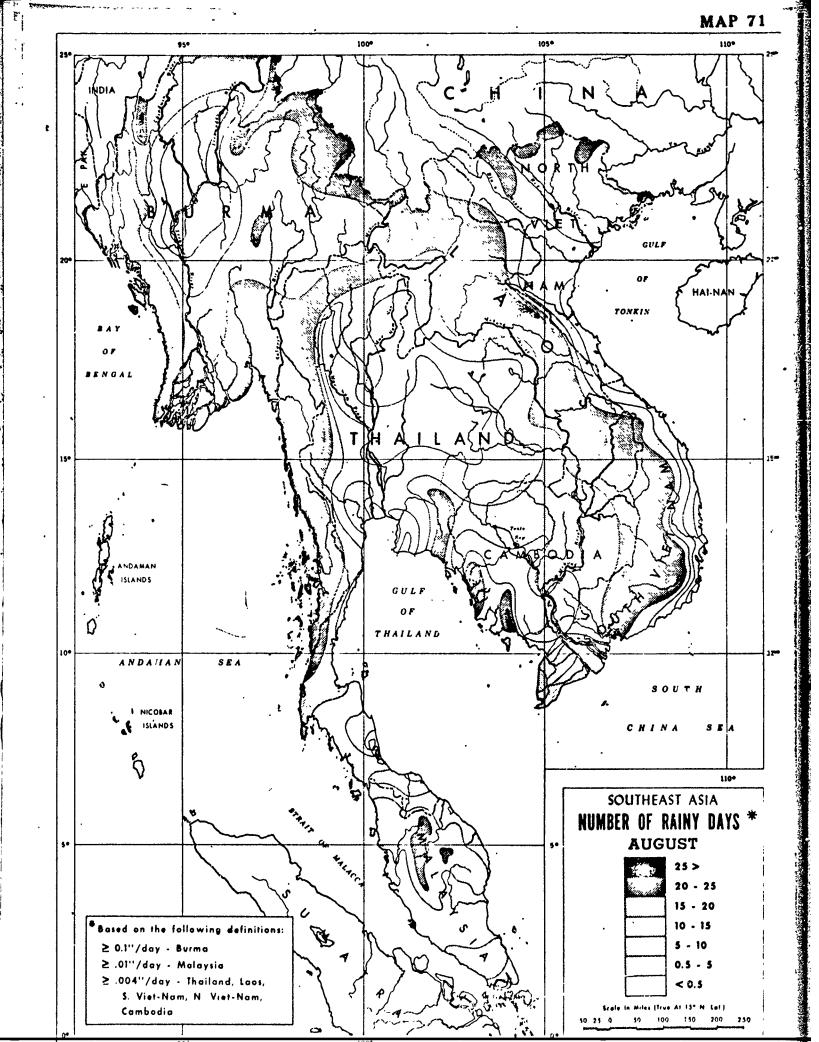


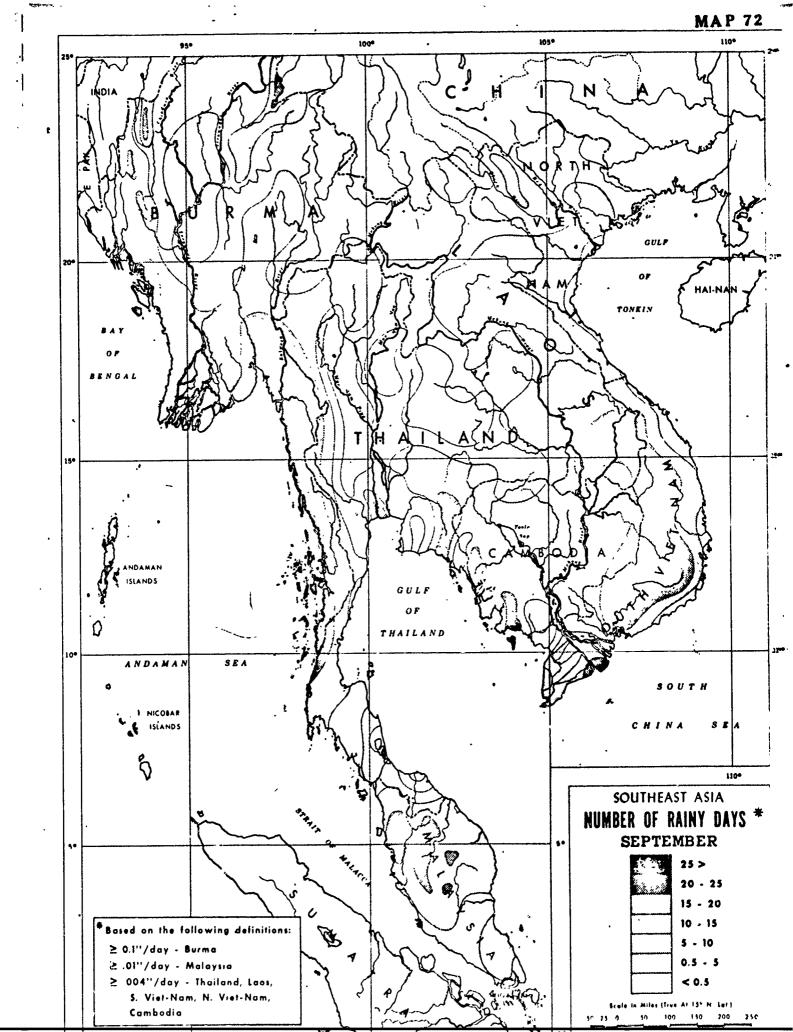


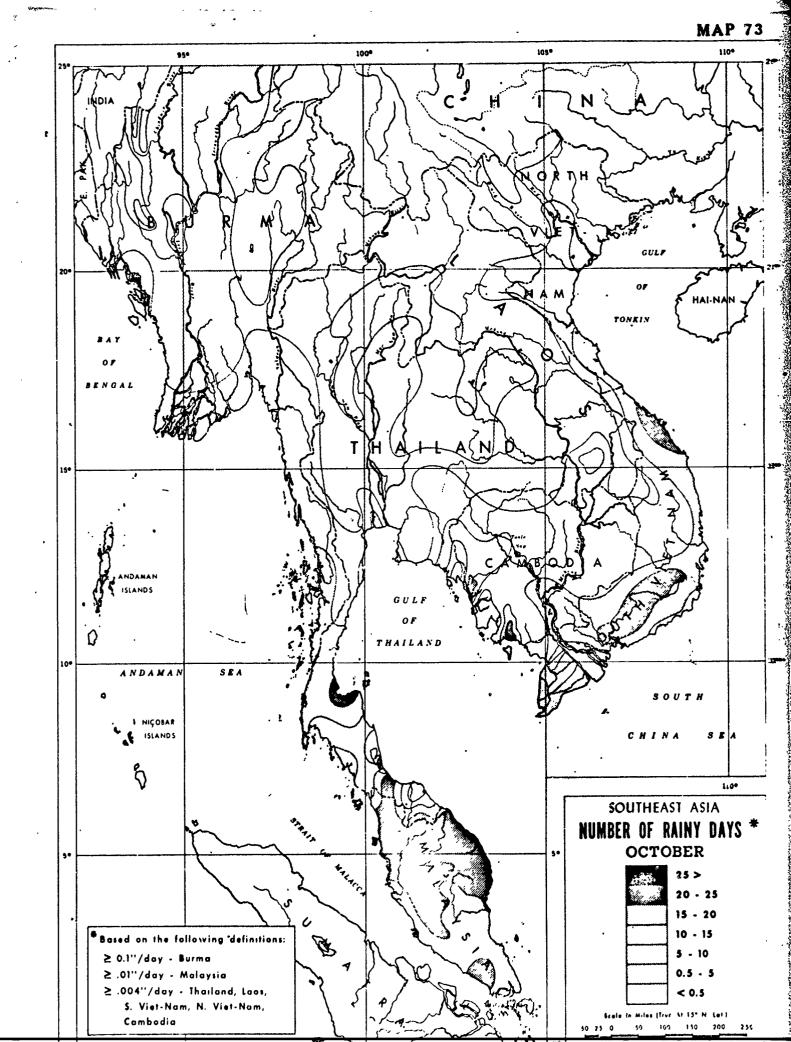


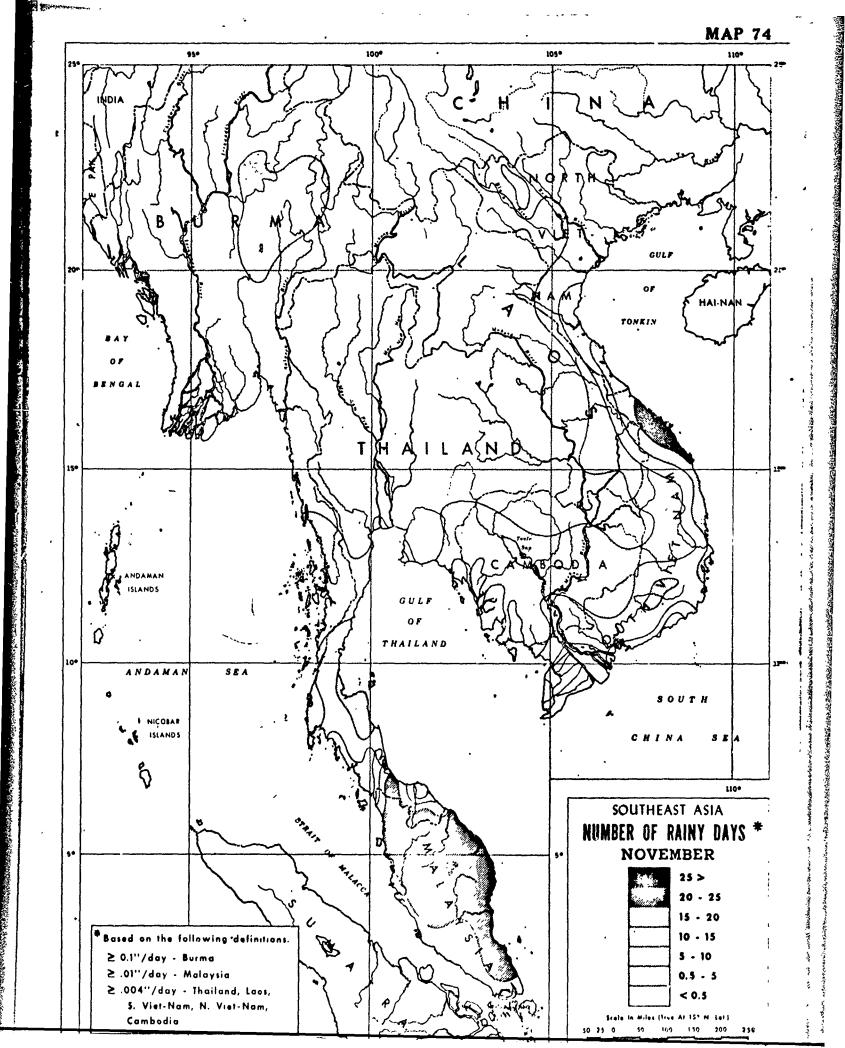


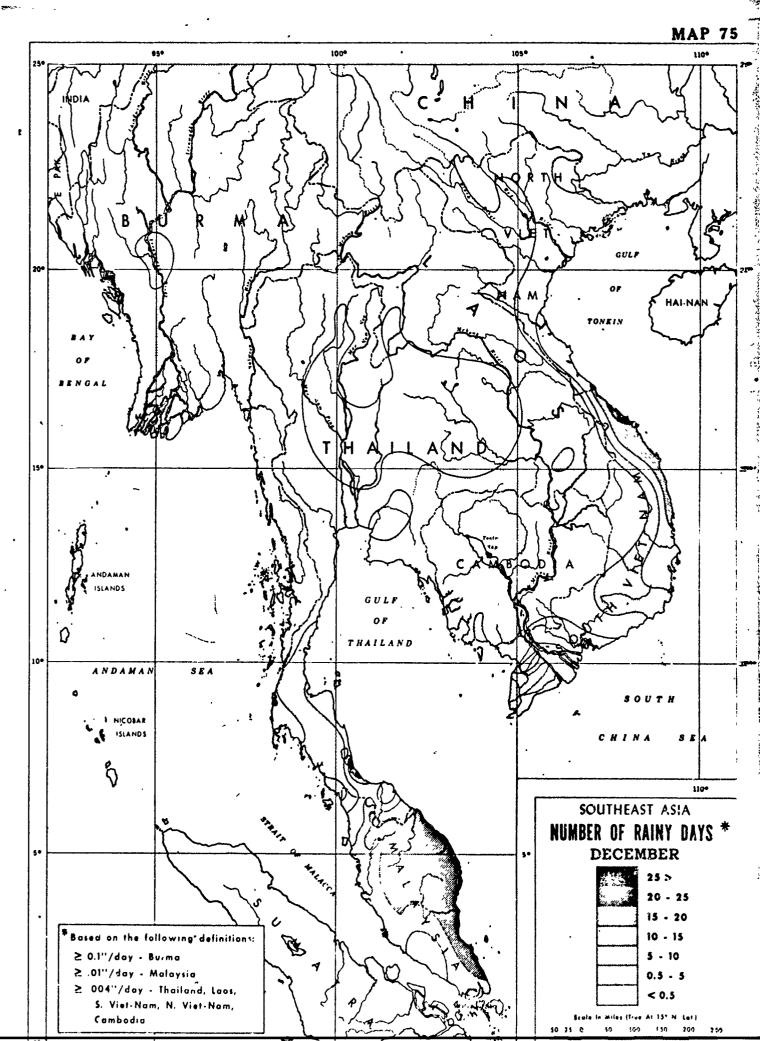












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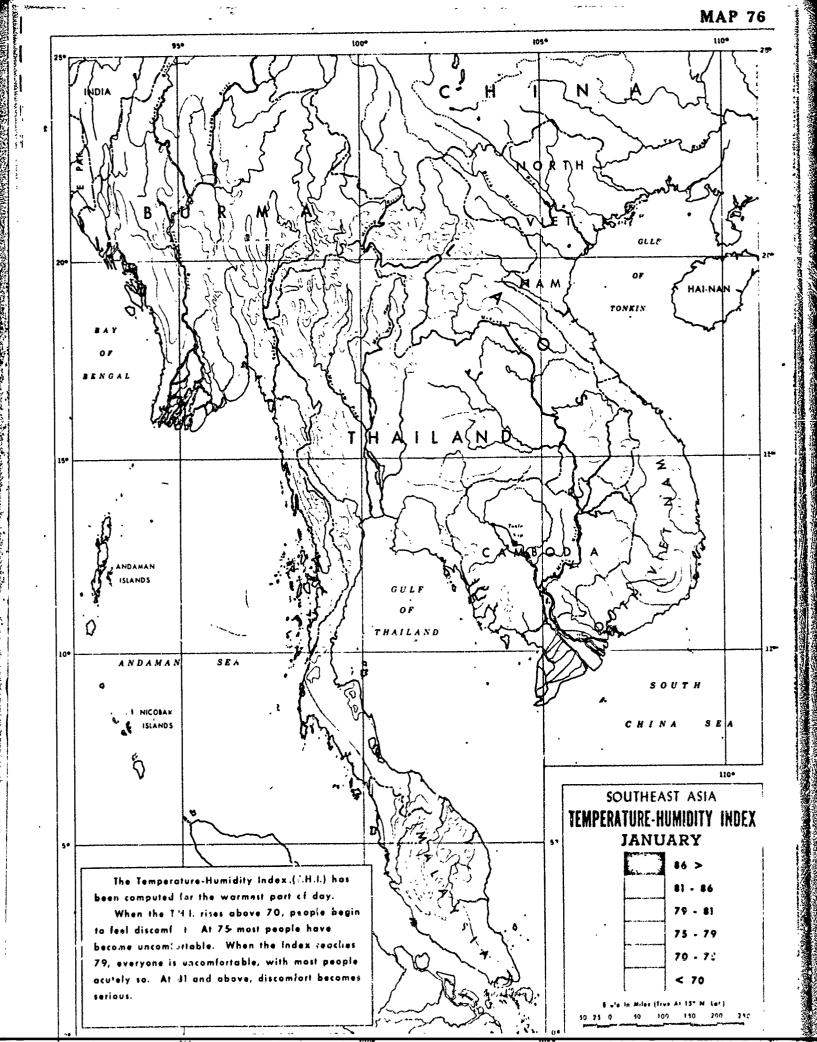
TEMPERATURE-HUMIDITY INDEX

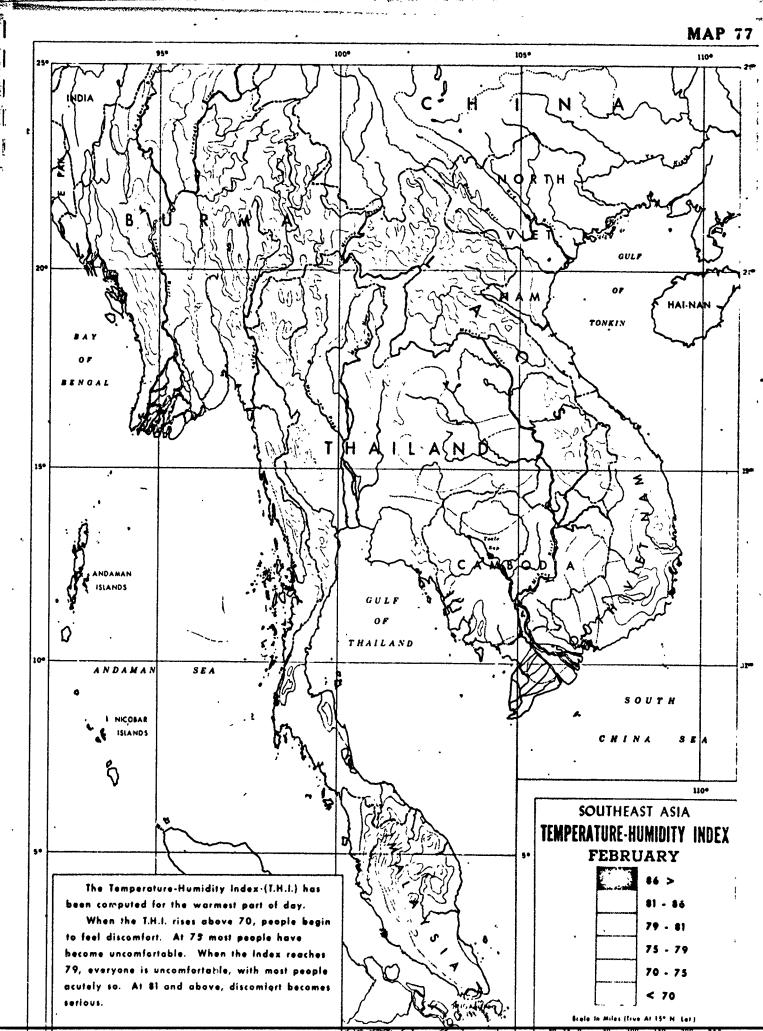
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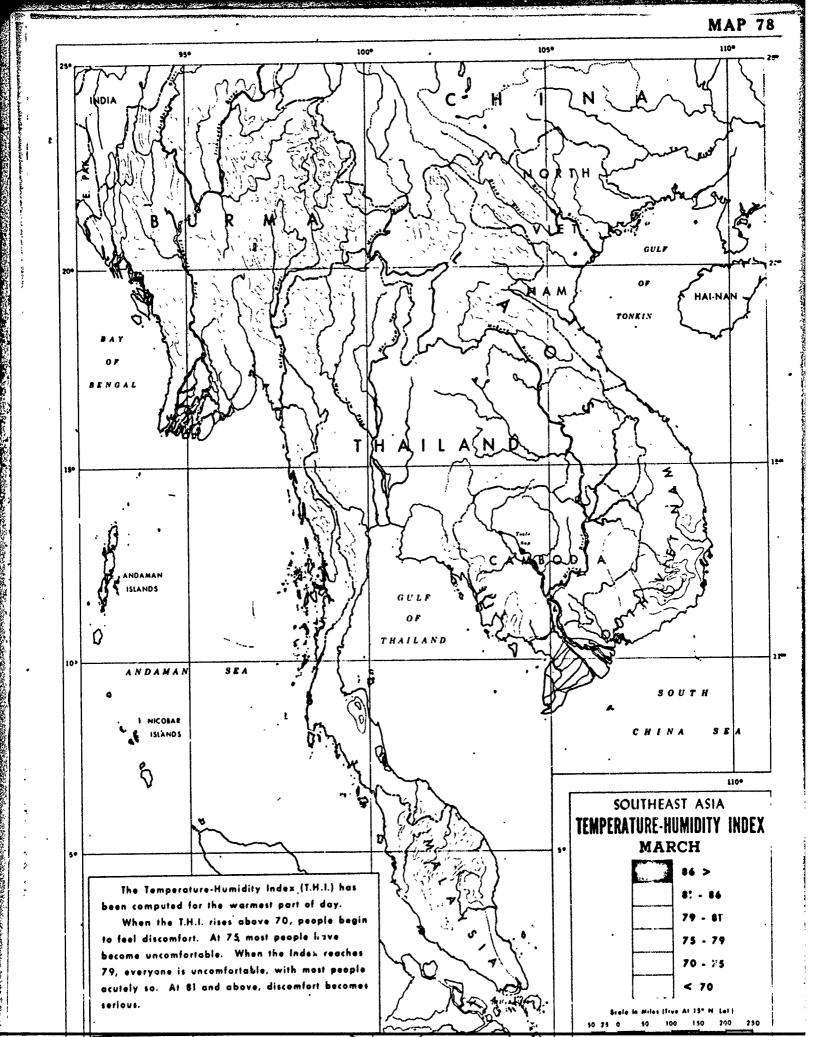
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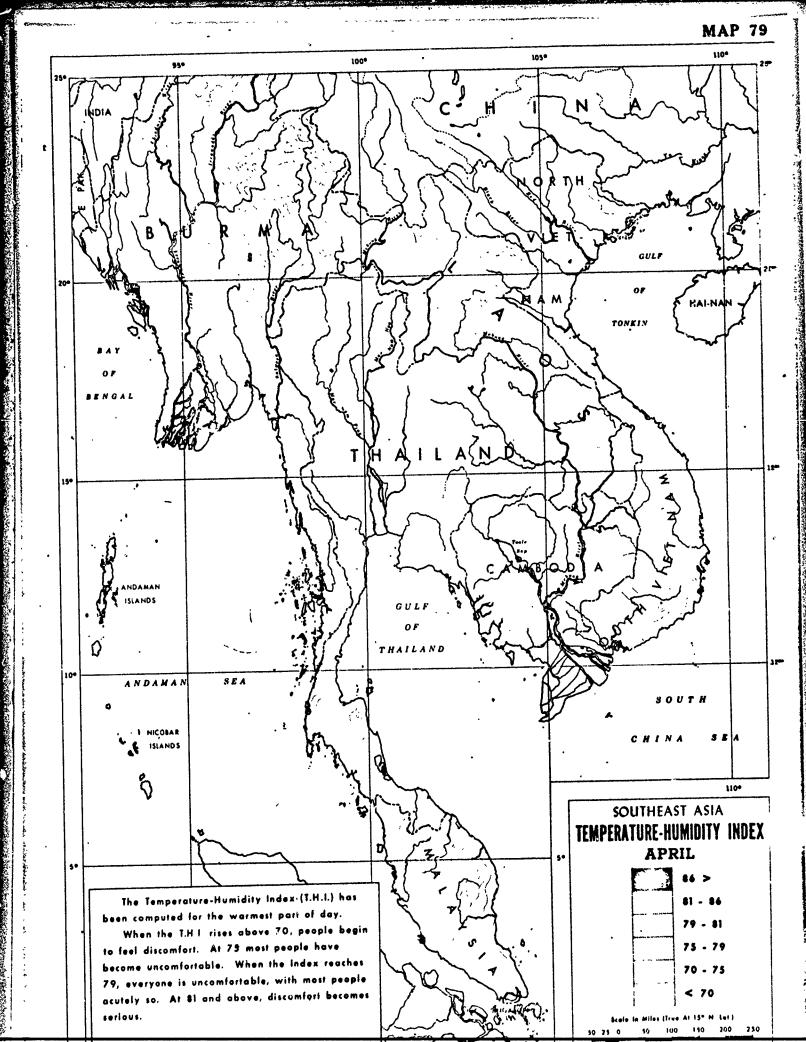
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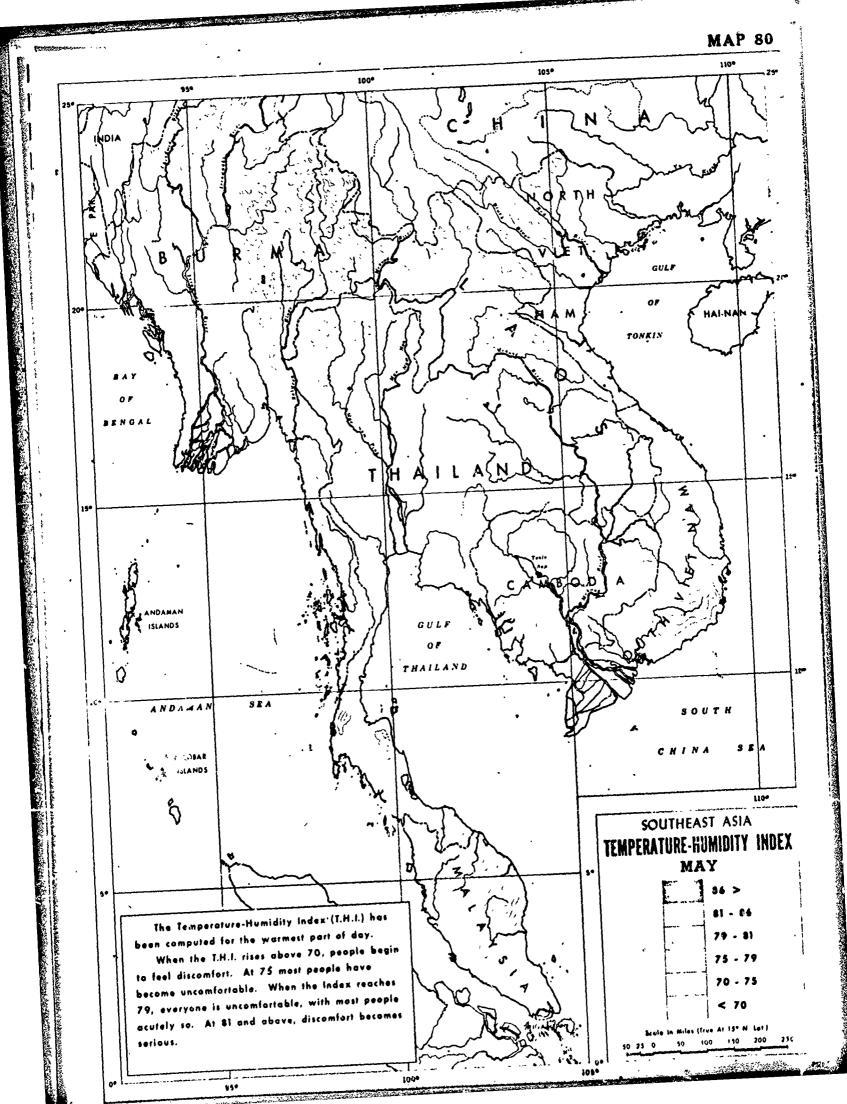


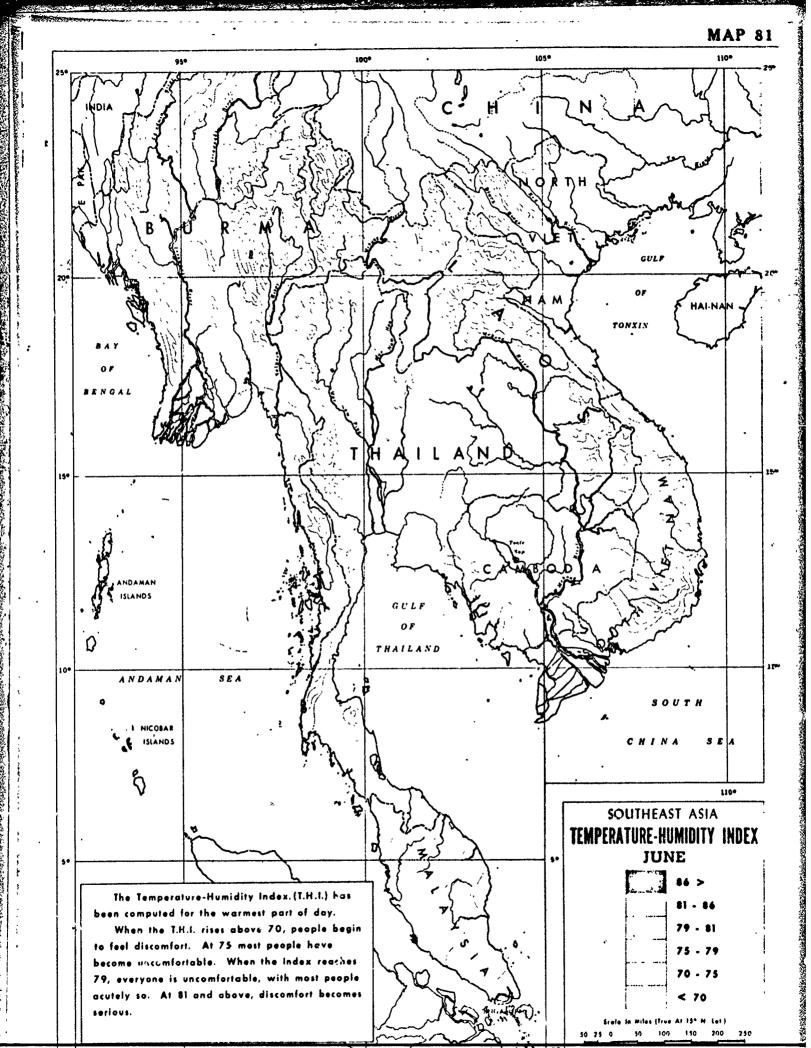


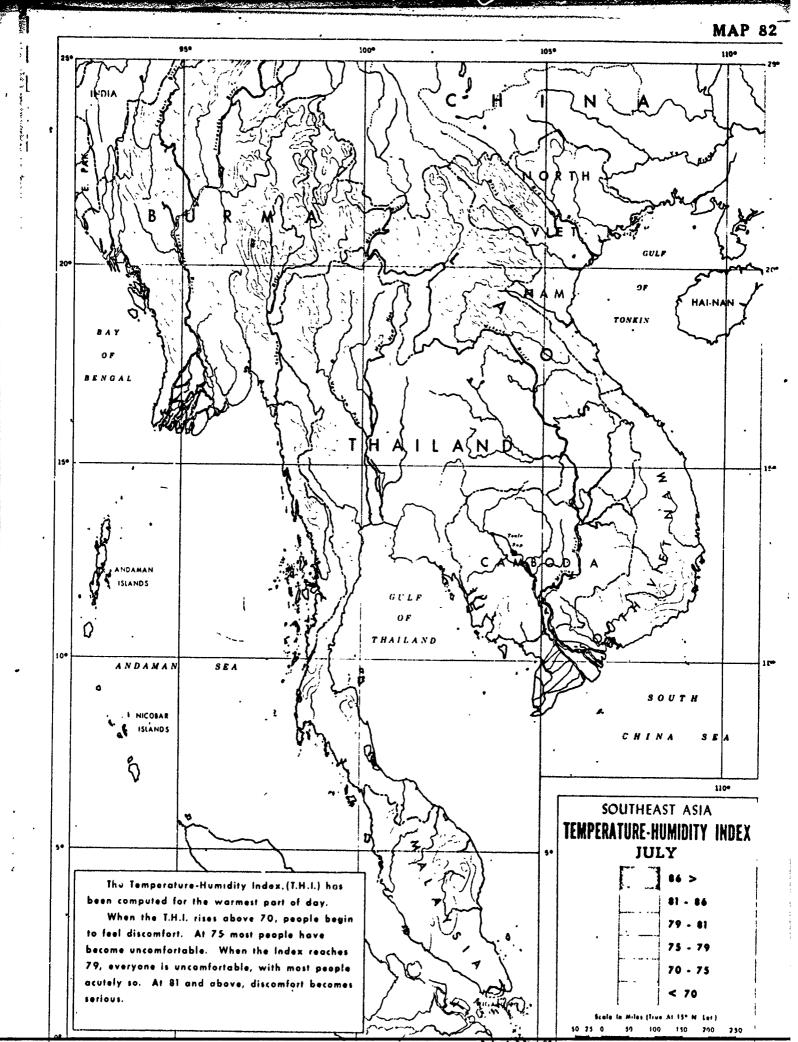
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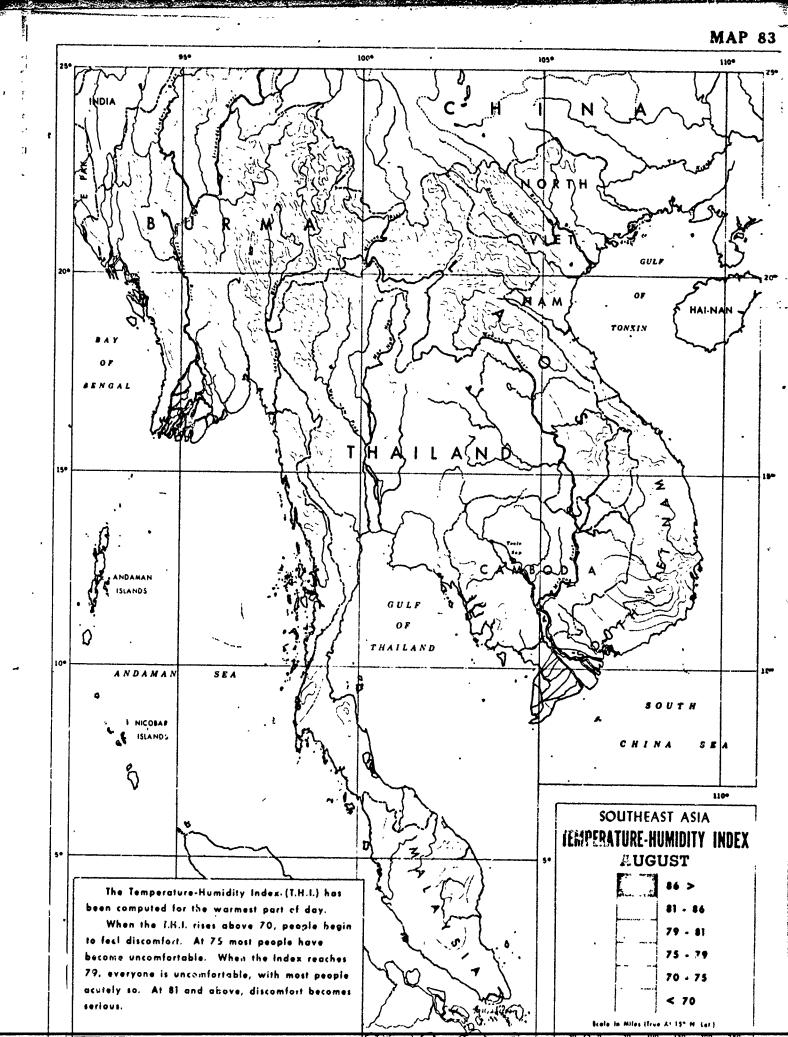


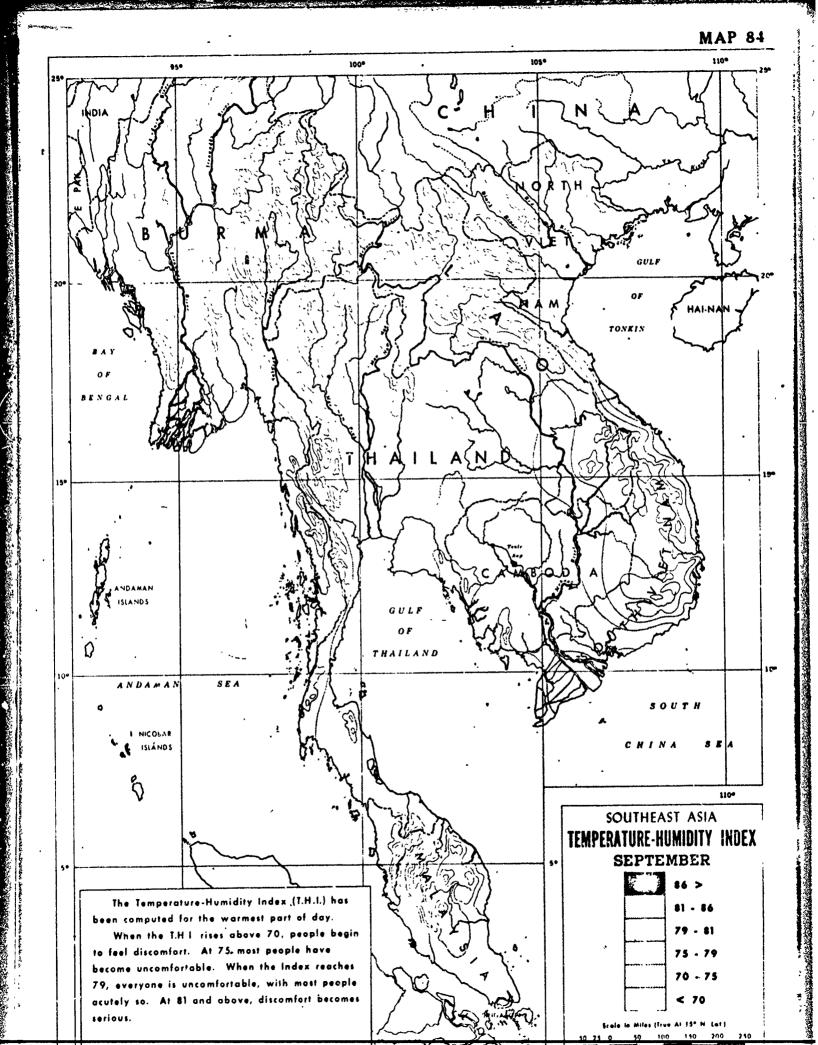




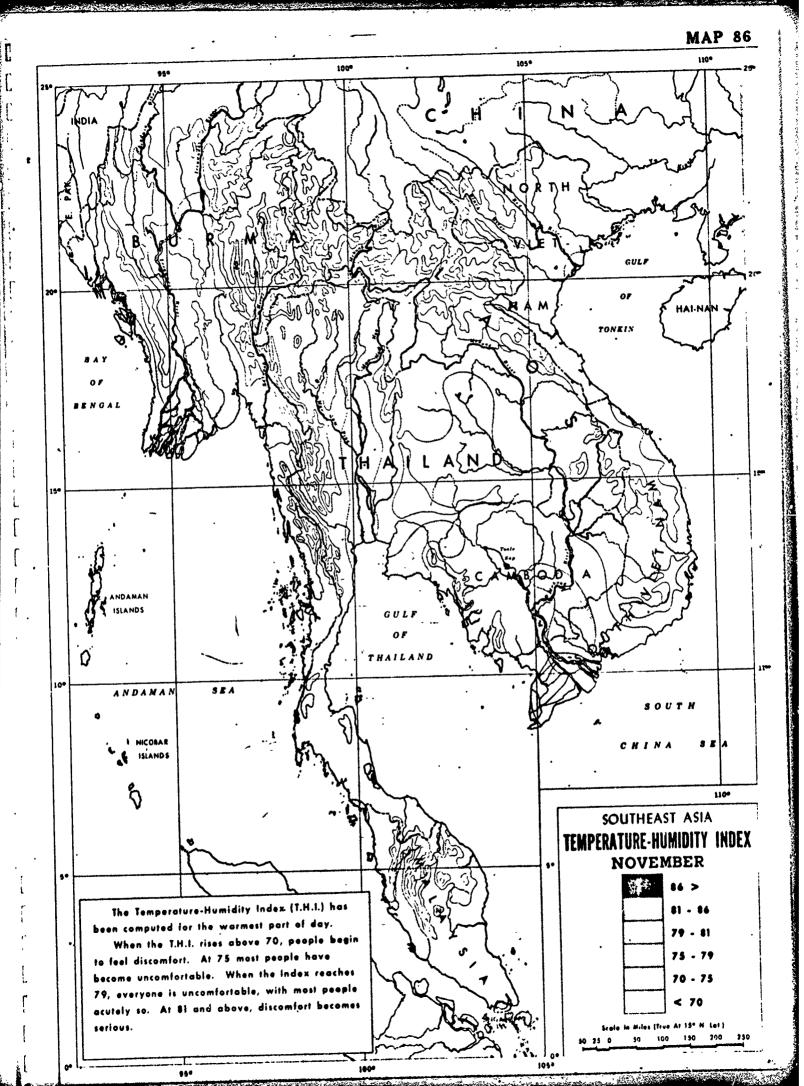












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