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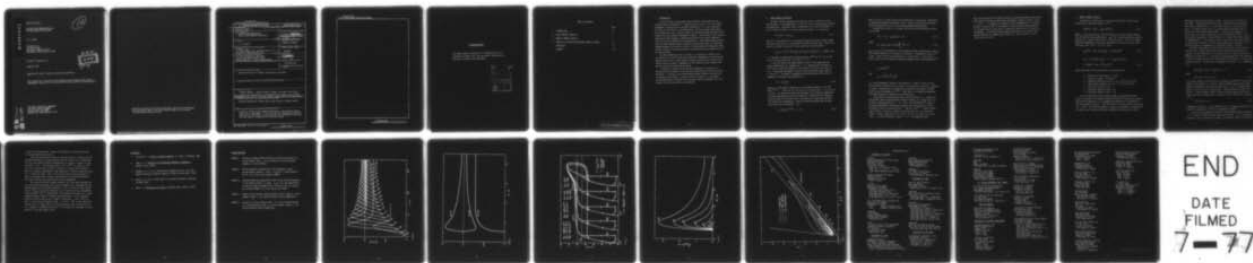
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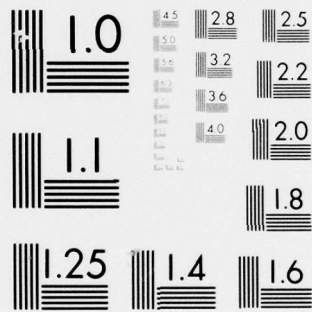


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WILSON CLOUD FORMATION BY LOW
ALTITUDE NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS

R. E. Waltz

Visidyne, Inc.
19 Third Avenue
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Burlington, Massachusetts 01803

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this article we shall deal with the Wilson Cloud formed by low altitude nuclear explosions⁽¹⁾. Despite the fact that it is a well-known phenomenon, we have found no detailed treatment of it in the literature. The basis of the effect is straightforward. During the weak shock phase of an explosion, over a certain volume, the pressure behind the shock front becomes less than ambient atmospheric pressure. Thus parcels of air passing through the shock undergo a sudden expansion and on occasion temporarily drive the relative humidity to supersaturation. Under these conditions the radii of water droplet aerosols present can grow many orders of magnitude, thereby momentarily forming a cloud in a region behind the advancing shock. We shall restrict the discussion here to maritime aerosols composed of salt solution droplets.

We shall demonstrate that (1) there is a threshold of ambient relative humidity for significant cloud formation independent of the explosion energy; and (2) over a wide range of explosion energies the maximum cloud droplet sizes are nearly independent of the ambient aerosol spectrum and may be scaled with the explosion energy.

In Section 2, below, we discuss the hydrodynamic flow behind the shock wave and its effect on the relative humidity which drives the cloud formation. In Section 3 we review droplet growth kinetics and the basis for droplet size scaling. Finally, we give in Section 4, a universal scaled formulation of droplet size and cloud location together with a discussion of the limitations on our approach.

2. SHOCK HUMIDITY PROFILES

We shall concern ourselves here with the time, t , history of relative humidity, S , and temperature, T ($^{\circ}\text{K}$), of an air parcel passing through the shock wave. The parcel shall be denoted by its initial altitude, z , and its radial distance r , from the explosion center. S is given by

$$S \equiv [X/(X + \epsilon)] P/p_s \quad (2.1)$$

where P is the pressure; X is the absolute humidity (grams of water vapor per gram of dry air); ϵ is the specific gravity of water vapor relative to that of air (0.621); and $p_s(T)$ is the saturation vapor pressure

$$p_s(T) \equiv (3.53 \times 10^4 \text{ dynes cm}^{-2}) \exp [-(L\epsilon/R_d)(1/T - 1/300)] \quad (2.2)$$

L is the heat of vaporization of water ($2.42 \times 10^{10} \text{ erg g}^{-1}$); R_d is the dry air gas constant ($2.87 \times 10^6 \text{ erg g}^{-1} \text{ K}^{-1}$).

A crucial simplifying approximation results from neglecting the water condensation, ΔX , compared to X . X is typically of the order of 10^{-2} and for explosion energies of the order of 10 kt, ΔX is at worst 1% of X . (We assume throughout a typical maritime aerosol number density of 100 cm^{-3}). The heat of condensation associated with the ΔX gives a temperature deviation from adiabaticity

$$\Delta T = -(L/C_p)\Delta X \quad (2.3)$$

where C_p is the specific heat of air at constant pressure ($1.05 \times 10^7 \text{ erg g}^{-1} \text{ K}^{-1}$). Using $\Delta X \sim 10^{-4}$ we find $\Delta T \sim 0.2 \text{ K}$ and $(\Delta S/S) = -17.45 (\Delta T/T) + (\Delta X/X) \sim 1\%$ which represents the strength of the coupling between dry air shock hydrodynamics and cloud formation. Neglecting this coupling allows the use of existing dry air calculations of shock wave profiles for pressure and temperature. These calculations assume that the post shock wave flow is adiabatic, i.e.,

$$T = T_s (P/P_s)^{(\gamma-1)/\gamma}; \quad \gamma = 1.4 \quad (2.4)$$

where P_S and T_S are the pressure and temperature of the parcel immediately following the passage of the shock front. Energy scaling laws presented below indicate the limitations on the decoupling approximation.

Decoupling of the dry air shock flow from the cloud formation allows us to write

$$S(r, z, t) = S_0(z) M(r, z, t) \quad (2.5)$$

where

$$M = (P/P_0) \exp \left\{ 17.45 \left(\frac{300}{T_0} \frac{P_0}{P} - 1 \right) \right\} \quad (2.6)$$

P_0 , T_0 , ρ_0 , S_0 are respectively, the ambient pressure, temperature, density, and relative humidity of the parcel in question. M depends on (P/P_0) and (ρ/ρ_0) . These ratios are functions of $\ell = (r/r_0)$ and $\tau = (t/t_0)$ only. Here r_0 and t_0 are the dynamic length and dynamic time of the explosion⁽²⁾:

$$r_0 \equiv (E/P_0)^{1/3}$$

and

$$t_0 \equiv E^{1/3} P_0^{-5/6} \rho_0^{1/2}$$

E is the hydrodynamic energy of the explosion. Figure 1 gives plots of the universal function $M(\tau, \ell)$ versus τ for various ℓ values ($T_0 = 288.15$ K is used). These curves are based on the numerical treatments of shock profiles due to Needham, et al⁽³⁾. Their work is in apparent agreement with that reported in Reference 2 and Reference 4.

As we shall see below significant cloud formation, i.e., large drop-let growth, results only when the relative humidity in a parcel at ℓ is driven to supersaturation $S > 1.0$. Thus, from Equation (2.5) there is an energy independent threshold of ambient humidity $S_{th}(\ell)$ for cloud formation at each ℓ given by $M^*(\ell)^{-1} = (\max\{M(\tau, \ell)\})^{-1}$. Figure 2 plots $S_{th}(\ell)$ versus ℓ . ($\Delta\tau(\ell)$ is defined after Equation 4.2). We find from Figure 1, that, regardless of S_0 , cloud formation can begin only after time $\tau \approx 0.35$ and outside a radius $\ell \approx 0.6$. We emphasize here

that cloud formation first begins during a period when neither strong shock (self-similar) theory nor weak shock (asymptotic) theory is valid. From $\tau \sim .03$ to $\tau \sim 1$ a numerical treatment of shock hydrodynamics is required. We note in passing that in the region of cloud formation, spatial motion of the parcel due to shock winds is generally small and of no interest to the problem. A striking feature apparent from Figure 2 is that if the ambient humidity is nowhere greater than 70% then no Wilson cloud of significance can form.

3. DROPLET GROWTH KINETICS

The equation of growth for a salt solution droplet, the principal constituent of maritime aerosols, is⁽⁵⁾

$$\bar{r}(d\bar{r}/dt) = [S(t) - S_{eq}(\bar{r},m)]/Y(T) \quad (3.1)$$

where S is the shock driven relative humidity in the air parcel containing the droplet as discussed above. $S_{eq}(\bar{r},m)$ is the equilibrium relative humidity for a droplet with radius $\bar{r}$, and salt mass m . $Y(T)$ is a weakly temperature-dependent coefficient determined by the heat and water vapor diffusion rates in air. In c.g.s. units

$$S_{eq}(\bar{r},m) = \exp(2\sigma\epsilon/\rho_L R_d T \bar{r}) - 3i mM/\pi\rho_L W \bar{r}^3 \quad (3.2)$$

$$Y(T) = (L\rho_L/KT)(L\epsilon/(R_d T) - 1) + \rho_L R_d T/(D\epsilon P_S(T))$$

$$(Y(300K) = 7.26 \times 10^5 \text{ sec/cm}^2) \quad (3.3)$$

where quantities not given previously are defined here:

- ρ_L = density of liquid water = 1 g cm^{-3}
- σ = surface of water = 72 dyne cm^{-1}
- K = thermal conductivity of air = $2.5 \times 10^3 \text{ erg cm}^{-1} \text{ sec}^{-1}$
- D = water vapor diffusivity in air = $2 \times 10^{-1} \text{ cm}^2 \text{ sec}^{-1}$
- i = Van Hoff's constant = 2.7
- M = molecular weight of water = 18
- W = molecular weight of salt = 58

As an illustration of the droplet growth and evaporation cycle, Figure 3 considers five exemplary droplet species of salt mass m_i (grams) and relative population n_i (as suggested by Reference 5) contained in a typical shocked air parcel. (For this case E is of the order of 10 kt and $S_0 \sim 0.89$). The relative humidity S seen by the droplets is plotted versus their radii starting from their entrance to the shock until their

evaporation behind the advancing clouds. The $S_{eq}(\bar{r}, m_i)$ curves are also shown. Upon entering the shock wave a droplet quickly evaporates and, after a sudden drop in S , its nucleus returns to its equilibrium curve. It remains there until S is driven beyond supersaturation, at which point rapid droplet growth begins. Each species tagged by its initial mass is found to grow nearly to the same maximum radius. Such narrowing of the droplet radial spectrum is in common with droplet growth in thunderheads⁽⁵⁾. This feature, which we shall call universal growth, is particularly striking in Wilson cloud growth where the droplet size at maximum growth are independent of the ambient aerosol spectrum.

Universal growth may be understood by noting that for each droplet species, once S passes above unity, where significant growth results, $S_{eq}(\bar{r}, m)$ for the resulting $\bar{r}$ is very nearly equal to unity and may be so replaced in Equation 3.1. This allows the growth equation to be rewritten in terms of scaled variables and the universal function $M(\tau, \ell)$ driving the relative humidity. We have then, independent of species, i.e., independent of m ,

$$d((1/2)R^2(\tau, \ell))/d\tau \approx (S_0(z) M(\tau, \ell) - 1) \quad (3.4)$$

where

$$\bar{r}^2(t, r, m) = R^2(\tau, \ell) t_0 Y^{-1} \quad (3.5)$$

Y is nearly constant over the course of growth and evaporation and we use $Y(300)$ as given above. At a given ℓ , cloud formation begins and maximum growth is obtained at the times for which $M(\tau, \ell) = S_0^{-1}$. We denote these times as $\tau_1^*(\ell)$ and $\tau_2^*(\ell)$ respectively. They may be easily read from Figure 1. Since droplets typically attain radial growths significantly larger than their ambient radii, a suitable initial condition for Equation 3.4 is

$$R^2(\tau_1^*(\ell), \ell) \approx 0 \quad (3.6)$$

independent of species. No new length scale is introduced thereby and the solution to Equations 3.4 and 3.6 is therefore universal.

To clarify the meaning of universal scaled droplet growth (Equations 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6) note that they imply the following: if at a distance r and time t from an explosion of energy E the droplet radius in the Wilson

cloud is $\bar{r}$, then for explosion energy E' , $\bar{r}' = \bar{r}(E'/E)^{1/6}$ at $r' = r(E'/E)^{1/3}$ and $t' = t(E'/E)^{1/3}$ assuming the same ambient humidity prevails. Furthermore the approximate cloud droplet size can be calculated entirely without regard to the ambient aerosol spectrum.

4. RESULTS OF SCALING AND UNIVERSAL DROPLET GROWTH

We present here scaled formulas for maximum droplet size as well as location contours of cloud formation and evaporation. For each ℓ value for distance from the explosion center, we may approximate that portion of the M function greater than unity as a parabola

$$M(\tau, \ell) \approx (M^*(\ell) - 1) (1 - y^2) + 1 \quad (4.1)$$

where $M^*(\ell)$ is the maximum of M for the given ℓ (See Figure 2); and

$$y = [(\tau - \tau_2) + (\Delta\tau/2)]/(\Delta\tau/2) \quad (4.2)$$

where $\Delta\tau(\ell) = \tau_2(\ell) - \tau_1(\ell)$ and τ_1 and τ_2 are the times at which M passes through unity.

Integrating the scaled droplet growth Equation 3.4, subject to the universal initial condition Equation 3.6, over the time such that $S_0 M \geq 1.0$ (i.e., between $\tau_1 \geq \tau_1^*$ and $\tau_2 \leq \tau_2^*$) we find

$$R_{\max}^2(\ell) = R^2(\tau_2^*(\ell), \ell) =$$

$$(4/3) \Delta\tau(\ell) \left[\left(\frac{S_0}{S_{th}(\ell)} \right) - 1 \right] \left[\frac{1 - (S_{th}(\ell)/S_0)}{1 - S_{th}(\ell)} \right]^{1/2} \quad (4.3)$$

$\Delta\tau(\ell)$ is plotted in Figure 2 along with $S_{th}(\ell)$. $R_{\max}^2(\ell)$ is plotted in Figure 4 for various ambient

By using the exact M functions to integrate Equation 3.4 beyond $\tau_2^*(\ell)$ to evaporation where R^2 returns to zero, we obtain the evaporation time $\tau_3^*(\ell)$. Figure 5 gives contours of cloud formation ($\tau_1^*(\ell)$), maximum growth ($\tau_2^*(\ell)$), and evaporation ($\tau_3^*(\ell)$), for various values of ambient relative humidity percentages ranging from 70% - 100%. Note that as the relative humidity approaches 100%, the cloud once formed at a given location ℓ , requires an increasingly longer time to evaporate. The contours may be read at constant τ to find the location of the outside and inside of the cloud, as well as the

λ value of maximum growth. Figure 4 and Equation 3.5 may then be used to find maximum droplet radius.

The scaling laws may be used to find the limits of validity for the approach taken here. We have noted in Section 2 that for E of the order of 10 kt and neglecting water condensation, ΔX results in errors of S of the order of 1%. Since droplet radii scale as $E^{1/6}$, ΔX scales as $E^{1/2}$. Thus for E of the order of 100 kt, the error in S would be of order 3% which is probably unacceptably large compared to a typical supersaturation ($S-1$) inside the cloud. Thus, for accurate results larger energies require a treatment which couples cloud formation to shock hydrodynamics, the simple scaling laws presented here being inadequate.

The universal droplet growth equations will also show breakdown for very low explosion energies such that the length scale introduced by the ambient droplet sizes becomes important. This is the case if the typical values of $R_{\max}^2$ (λ) given by Equation 4.2 or Figure 4 are not considerably larger than $R^2 \equiv \bar{r}_0^2 t^{-1}$ where $\bar{r}_0(\bar{m})$ is the equilibrium radius of a representative droplet species at 100% relative humidity. Let us consider a median salt grain such as #3 of Figure 3 which has $\bar{r}_0 = 4.5 \times 10^{-5}$ cm. For $E = 10$ kt this corresponds to $R_0^2 \sim .5 \times 10^{-3}$. This is well above the typical values of $R_{\max}^2$ which in turn are conservatively of the order of .01. However, since R_0^2 scales like $E^{-1/3}$ we expect our treatment to break down for E less than about 10^{-3} kt.

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

- FIGURE 1: Universal shocked relative humidity multiplying function, M , versus dynamic time, τ , for air parcels at various dynamic lengths, ℓ , (curve labels).
- FIGURE 2: Relative humidity threshold for cloud formation, $S_{th}(\ell)$, versus dynamic length ℓ ; $M^*(\ell) = [S_{th}(\ell)]^{-1}$; pulse duration for $M > 1.0$, $\Delta\tau(\ell)$, versus dynamic length ℓ .
- FIGURE 3: Droplet growth and evaporation curves in the relative humidity, S , and droplet radius, $\bar{r}$, plane. $S_{eq}(\bar{r}, m)$, the equilibrium curves are shown as dashed curves. The salt mass, m_i (grams), and relative number n_i , of the species are shown.
- FIGURE 4: Square of the universal maximum droplet radius, $R_{max}^2(\ell)$, versus dynamic length, ℓ , for various ambient relative humidities.
- FIGURE 5: Contours of cloud formation time, τ_1^* , time of maximum growth τ_2^* , and evaporation time, τ_3^* , versus dynamic length, ℓ , for various ambient relative humidities.

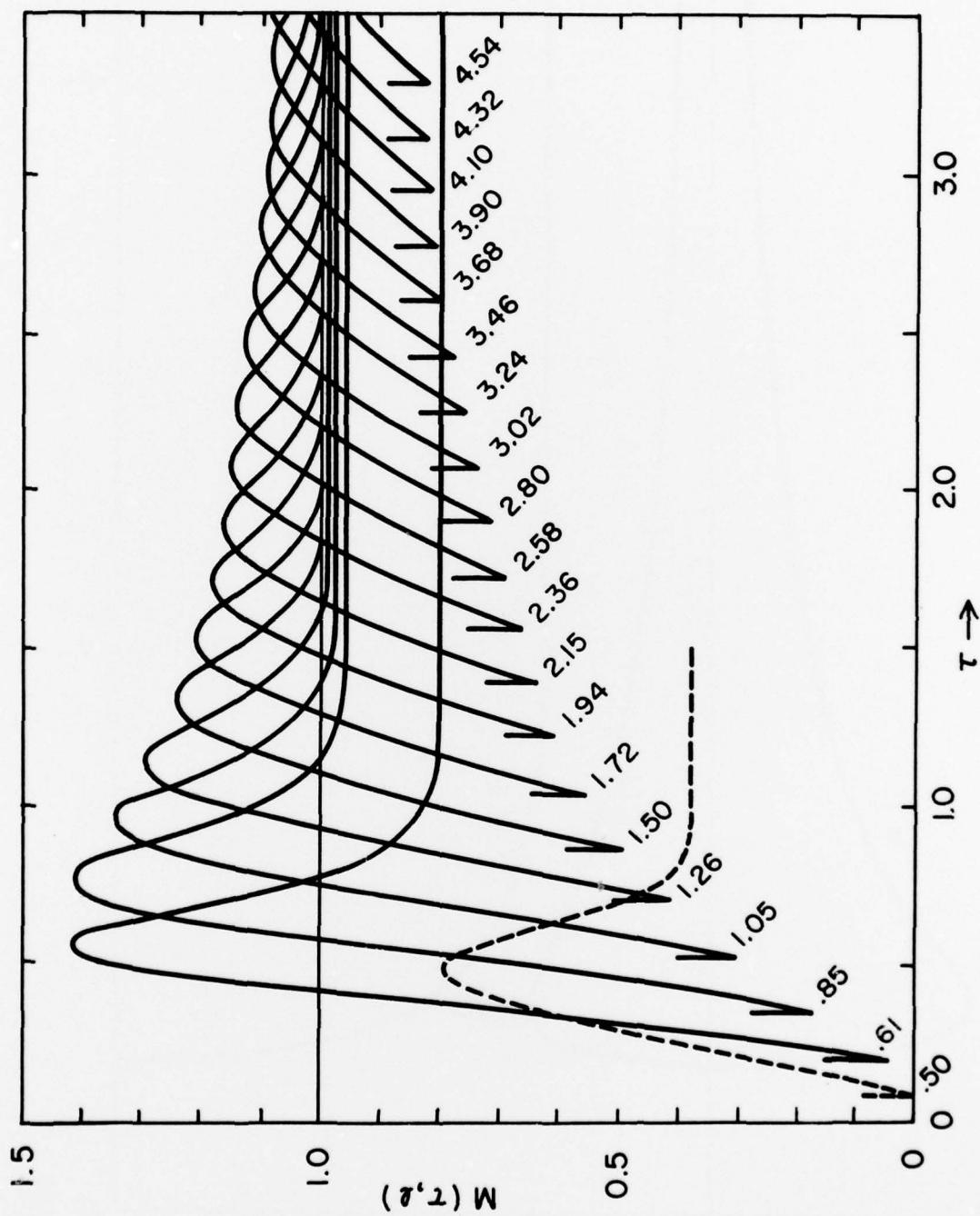


FIGURE 1

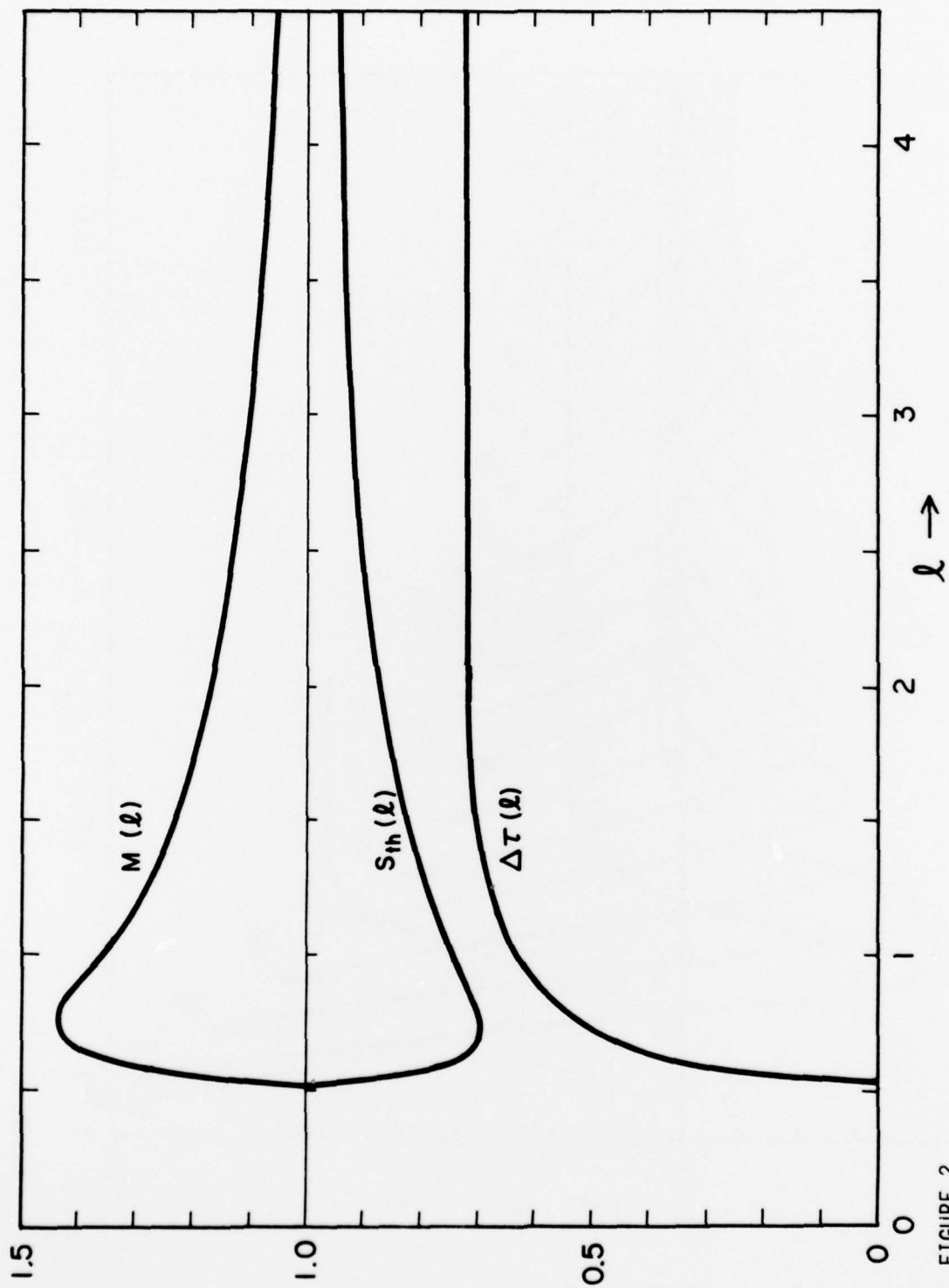


FIGURE 2

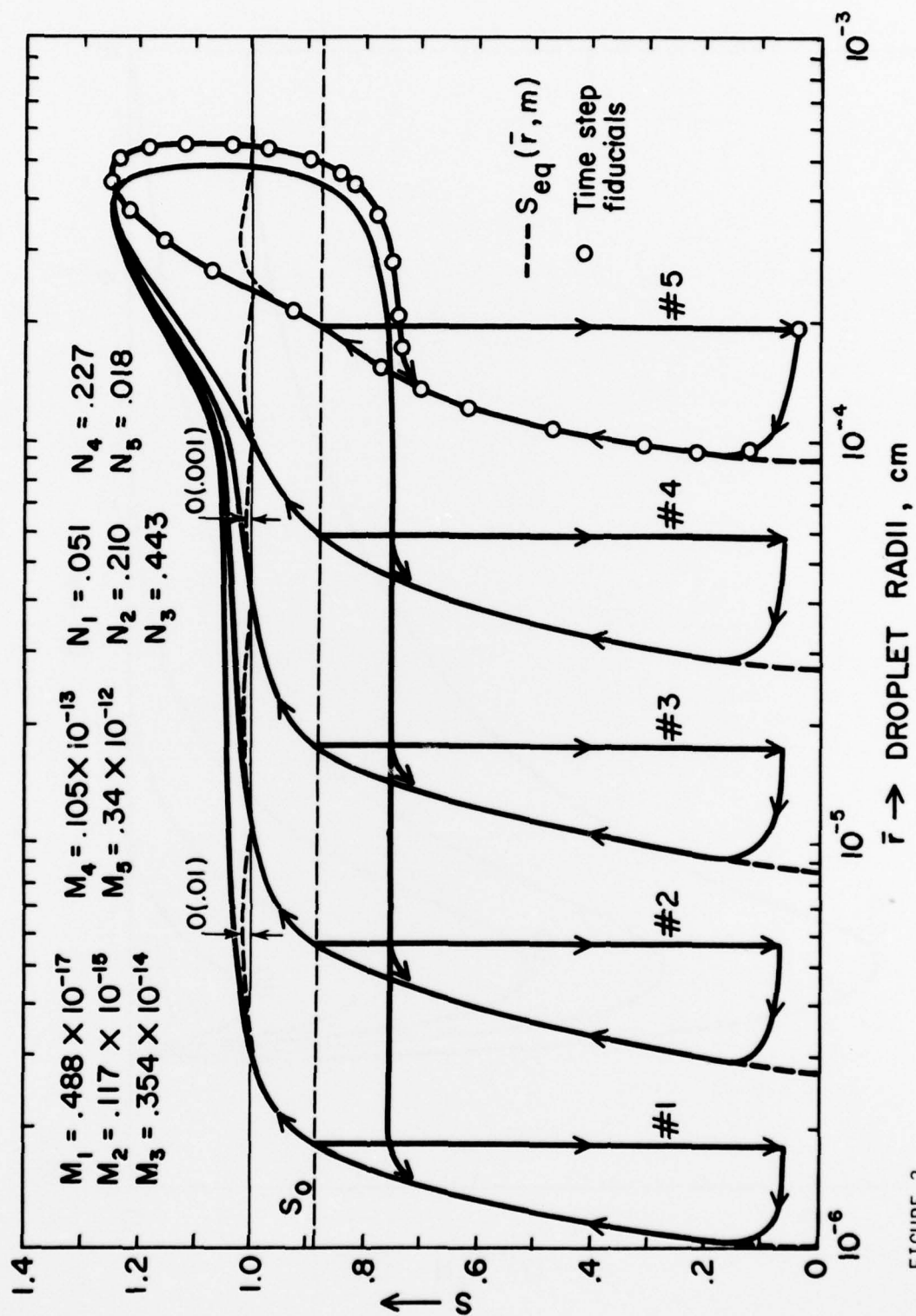


FIGURE 3

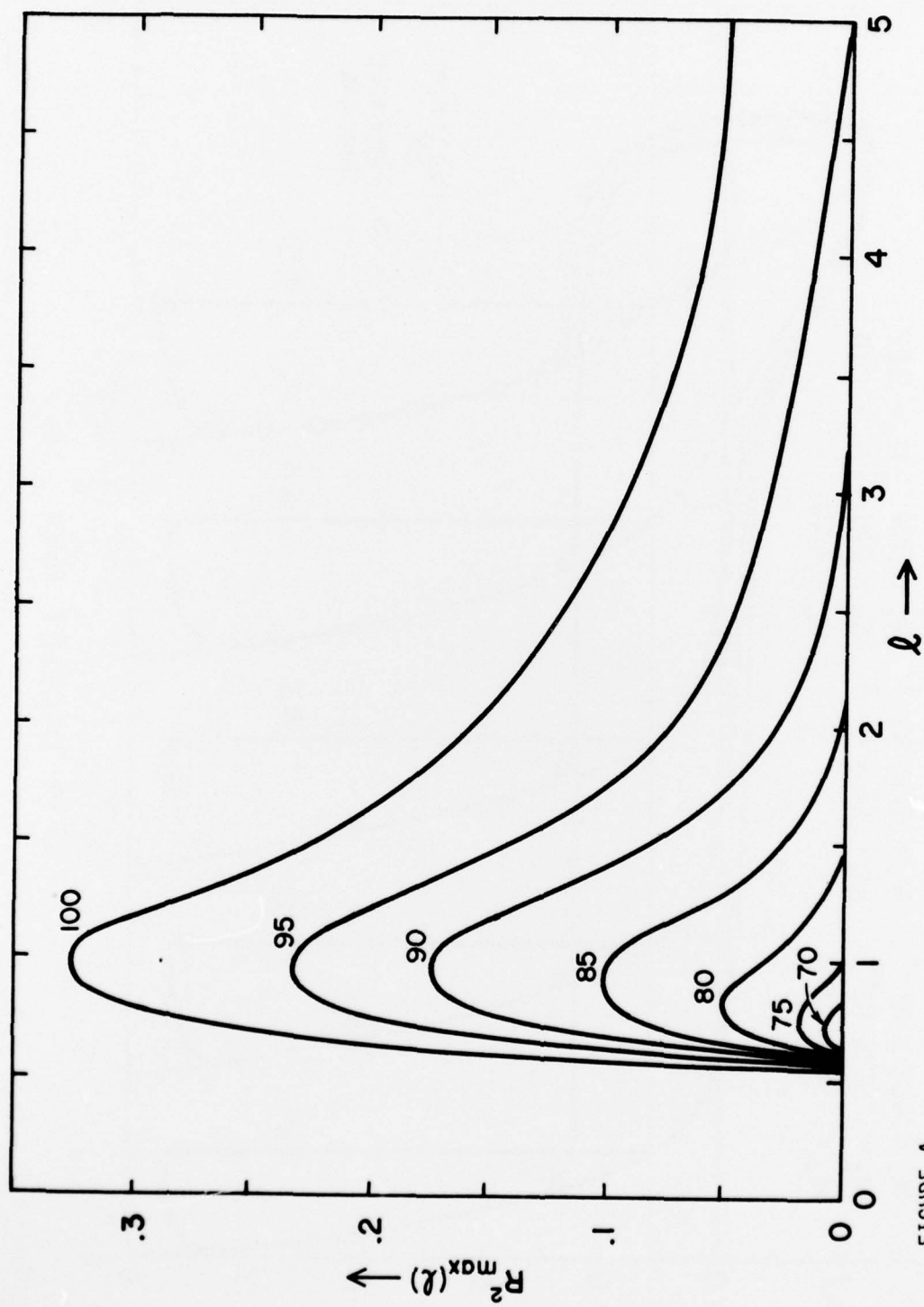


FIGURE 4

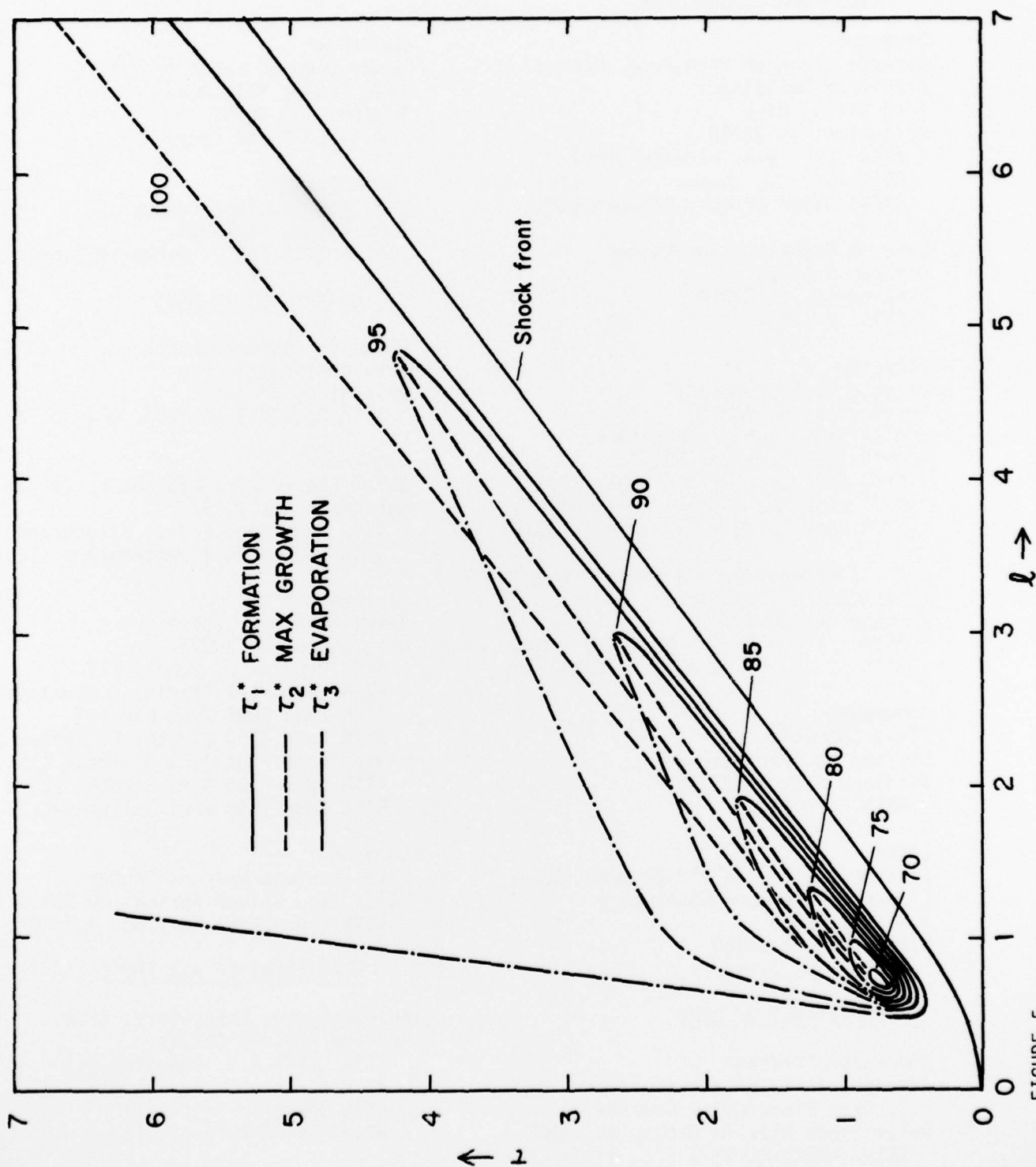


FIGURE 5

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