

7.5 SOLAR ABSORPTION FEEDBACKS IN SIMULATED STRATOCUMULUS

Jerry Y. Harrington*

Department of Meteorology, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania

1. INTRODUCTION

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The issue of modeling stratiform clouds including the effects of solar absorption is not new. Many previous studies have been conducted and, as valuable as those studies have been, most have used simple CTBL models (1-D and 2-D LES, or eddy resolving models) and/or simplified microphysical schemes. However, few studies to date have included the concomitant effects of both relatively detailed microphysics and radiation in less parametrically-constrained models such as LES (except for the recent study of Ackerman et al., 2000).

This issue, however, is important since the presence of a strong diurnal cycle in low, or boundary layer, clouds is prevalent in many observational studies. For instance Rozendall et al. (1999) use weather-ship data to show that the observed frequency of low clouds has a distinct diurnal cycle, with maximum cloud fractions peaking around dawn, and minimum cloud fractions near 15:00 local time. This diurnal cycle is also evident in satellite climatologies and appears most prevalent at Weather Station November, where the mean June-July-August frequency of stratus, stratocumulus or fog is greater than 60% (Klein et al., 1995).

The principal result of previous observational studies has been that stratiform cloud layers thin, often to the point of “breaking up” and dispersing, during the day. Pronounced diurnal cycles have been observed in other large-scale fields (e.g., vertical velocity), nonetheless the diurnal cycle in low cloudiness is normally attributed to the effects of solar radiation; as it is generally believed that the absorption of solar radiation tends to offset cooling by long-wave radiation, and that less radiative driving of the flow leads to more anemic circulations that are unable to maintain a well mixed layer in the face of stabilizing processes such as cloud base warming or entrainment.

From a climate change perspective, understanding the dynamics of the interaction of solar radiation and turbulent boundary layer circulations is also important. For instance, using a very simple model of the planetary boundary layer Boers and Mitchell (1994) showed that the magnitude of the Twomey (1974) effect may be sensitive to radiative-dynamical interactions. Their results showed that changes in drop concentration lead to alterations in solar absorption which then should feedback to cloud thickness and, hence, the reflectivity of the cloud layer. In particular, Boers and Mitchell made use of the fact as drop concentrations are increased from some small initial value (say $N = 50 \text{ cm}^{-3}$), solar absorption initially increases, reaches a maximum, and then decreases. Because of this, they were able to show that perturbations of drop concentrations from low to higher CCN concentrations could lead to reductions in cloud thickness and, hence, reductions in the standard Twomey effect.

In this study, a first attempt is made at examining how increases in drop concentration may alter cloud absorption and, therefore, feedback to cloud thickness and the Twomey effect.

2. METHOD

The model used for these studies is the LES version of the Regional Atmospheric Modeling System (RAMS). Long-wave and shortwave heating/cooling are computed with a two-stream radiative transfer model using 6 solar and 12 infrared bands (Harrington and Olsson, 2001). To examine first-order effects, we use only a simple condensation-condensed scheme and, therefore, no drizzle. Drop concentrations (N) are fixed and considered constant with height. This allows us to easily examine how perturbations in drop concentration may alter solar absorption/dynamic feedbacks in a simplified framework. Of course, drizzle would be expected to significantly influence our simulations and we plan to treat this effect in future simulations. In order for the radiation model to interact with the cloud, not only is the liquid water content (LWC) and N required, but a spectral width of the size distribution is also required (Harrington and Olsson, 2001). Here, we use a modified gamma distribution as is standard in RAMS (e.g. Walko et al., 1995) with a shape parameter that varies between $\nu = 6$ and 15 (broader to narrower drop size distributions.)

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The stratocumulus case simulated is a variant of that described in Moeng et al. (1996). Our modifications include using a simple constant- θ with height in the boundary layer (BL) initialization and alterations in BL top humidity inversion. These were primarily done to produce a slightly thicker cloud. Simulations were conducted with clouds containing various drop concentrations and using overhead sun only ($\theta_0 = 0^\circ$) for maximum solar absorptive effects. For brevity, we present results only from the $N = 50 \text{ cm}^{-3}$ and 500 cm^{-3} , for reasons that will become obvious.

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To set the stage for our later discussions of cloud evolution for different drop concentrations, and hence solar absorption, some illustrations of these radiative effects are in order.

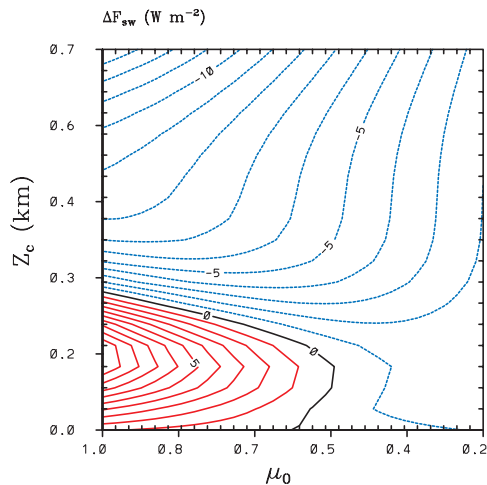


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Since cloud top longwave (IR) cooling is the main driving force in this case, an even better parameter to examine is the sum of the integrated solar absorption and IR emission.

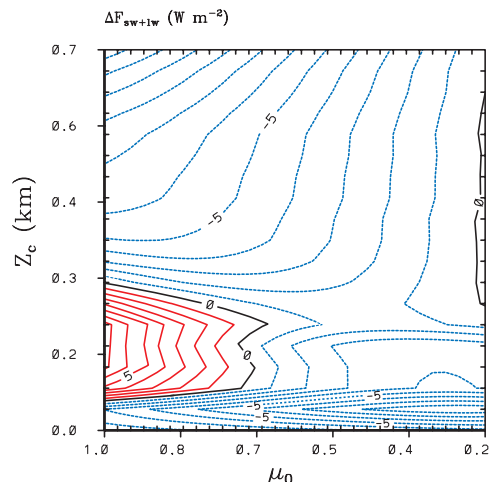


Figure 2. Same as Figure 1 except for integrated solar plus IR (ΔF_{sw+lw}).

This is shown in Fig. 2. The region of strong solar heating is now confined to a smaller set of solar zenith angles and for a smaller cloud depth range. Thick clouds, under a perturbation in drop concentration to 500 cm^{-3} , should show an increase in overall cloud cooling. Thinner clouds, however, when perturbed by a similar increase in drop concentration, should show an overall decrease in cloud cooling. Each situation will produce some sort of feedback to the cloud system itself.

In the LES studies presented below, we consider only overhead sun and clouds of $\sim 250 \text{ m}$ thickness. Our case falls within the regime, shown in Fig. 2, that should show an increase in solar heating, and therefore a decrease in overall cloud cooling given the above perturbation in drop concentration. Of course, these results will be sensitive to our choice of initial and final drop concentration. We chose values that should maximize the perturbative effect. Though this is the case, we plan to examine this in greater detail in the future.

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For brevity, and given the results shown in Figs. 1 and 2, we present results for simulations with $N = 50 \text{ cm}^{-3}$ (low concentration case) and $N = 500 \text{ cm}^{-3}$ (high concentration case). Since low drop concentration clouds have larger spectral widths, we use a gamma distribution shape parameter of 6 where as for the high drop concentration case we use a much

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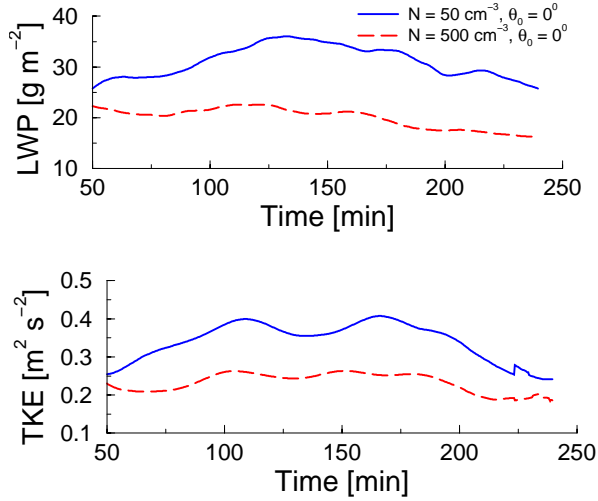


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uid water path (LWP) and turbulent kinetic energy (TKE) for the low and high drop concentration cases. Both the LWP and TKE are substantially reduced under the given perturbation in drop concentration. The case with greater drop concentrations shows a much shallower cloud with circulations that are significantly weakened. Figure 4 shows, potentially, why this is

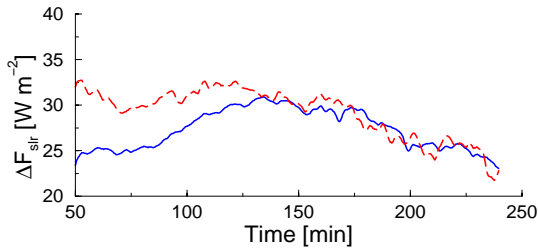


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Note that after about 150 min of simulation time, the total absorbed solar radiation approaches that of the low drop con-

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Not only is the cloud LWP changing with time, which is altering solar absorption, but the cloud fraction is also changing throughout the domain. Figure 5 shows that the enhanced

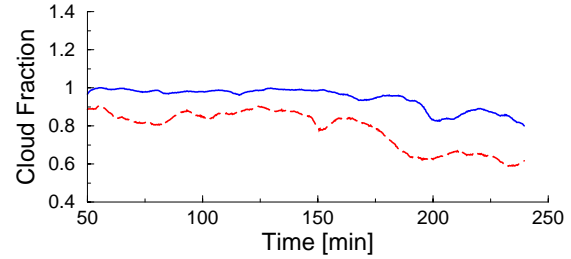


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solar heating experienced by the higher drop concentration case causes a significant increase in the amount of broken cloudiness. As one might imagine, this also affects the reflectivity and transmissivity of the modeled clouds.

Analysis of the various terms in the TKE budget illustrate that the above effects are primarily due to changes in the buoyancy profiles, as one might expect in this case. Figure 6 shows

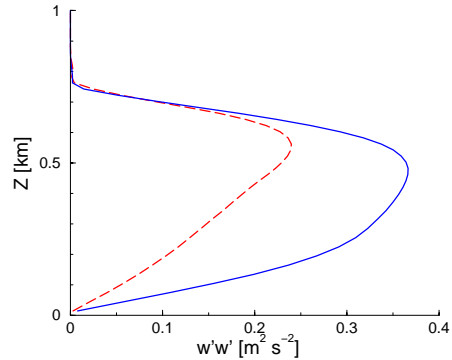


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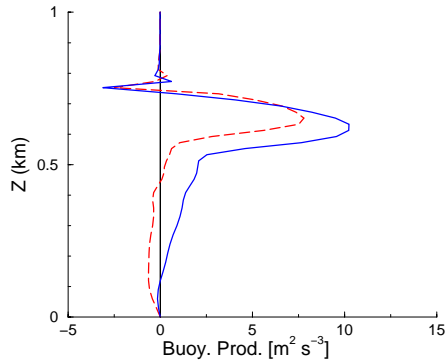


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time, it turns out that the sub-cloud layer is much more strongly stabilized throughout the simulation in the high concentration case (not shown).

As would be expected, this reduction in cloud depth should have a strong effect on cloud albedo. We expect that the standard Twomey effect would be substantially reduced in this situation. We plan to do further simulations to illustrate just how great the reduction in the Twomey effect may be in this case.

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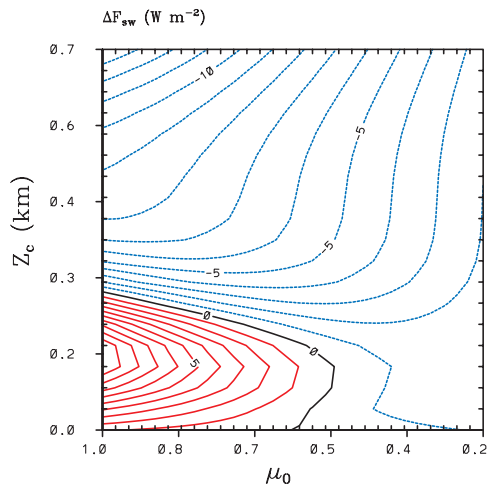


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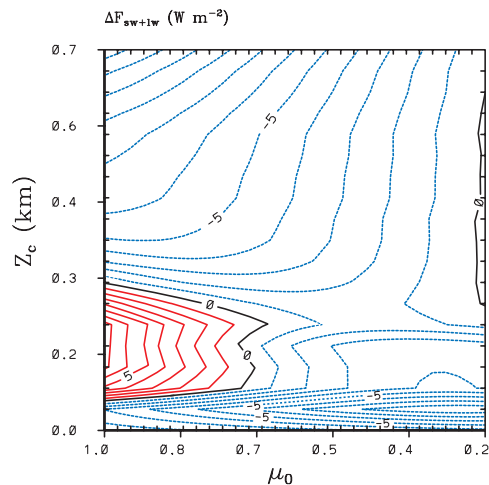


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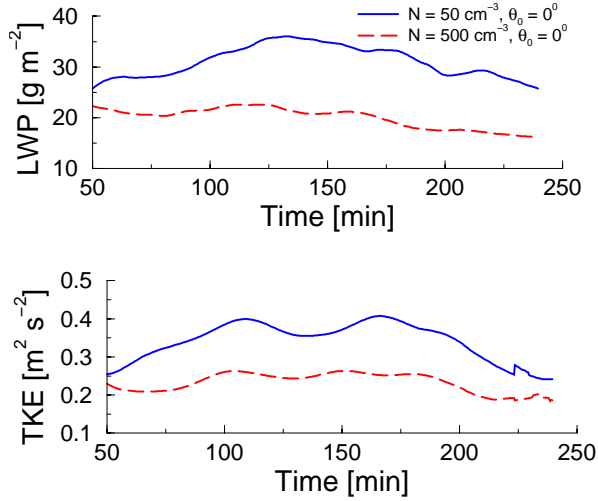


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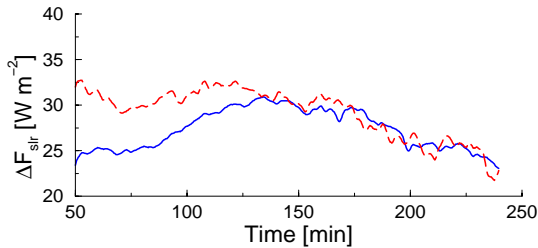


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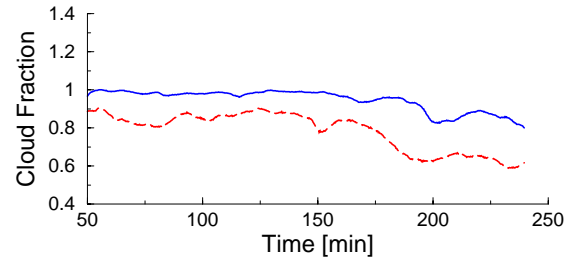


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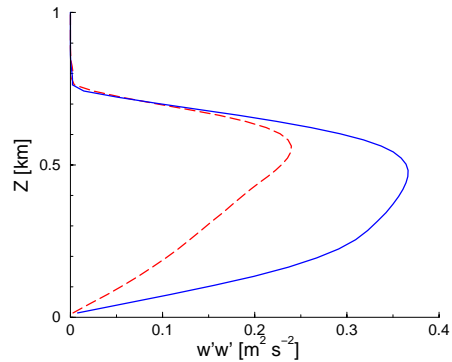


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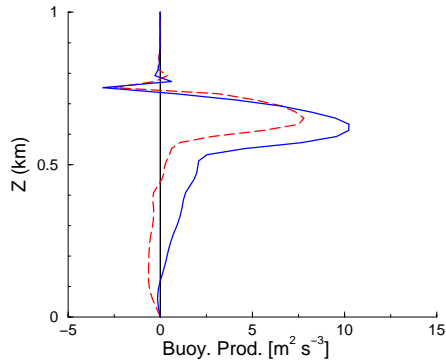


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