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A STUDY INTO THE THERMAL DECOMPOSITION KINETICS OF NITROGUANIDINE
USING ACCELERATING RATE CALORIMETRY

P.P. Lee

Canadian Explosives Research Laboratory

M.H. Back

Department of Chemistry, University of Ottawa

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P.P. Lee* and M.H.Back**

ABSTRACT

Thermal decomposition of nitroguanidine has been studied using accelerating rate calorimetry. The experimental data have been treated by three methods to evaluate the activation energy and frequency factor. Two methods using data gathered during the complete reaction yield very high activation energies whereas the values estimated using only measurements in the initial stage of the decomposition were much lower. The results suggest that the decomposition is accelerated by the gaseous reaction products. Additional studies show that neither the dilution of the sample with an inert material nor the substitution of nitrogen for the air atmosphere in the sample bomb had any significant effect on the rate of the decomposition. Rate constants were compared with those reported in previous studies and it is concluded that a significant change in the mechanism of decomposition occurs in the neighborhood of 160°C.

KEYWORDS: thermal decomposition, accelerating rate calorimeter, kinetic, nitroguanidine.

*Chemist, Canadian Explosives Research Laboratory, CANMET, Energy, Mines and Resources Canada, Ottawa.

**Professor, Department of Chemistry, University of Ottawa, Ottawa.

ÉTUDES CINÉTIQUES SUR LA DÉCOMPOSITION THERMIQUE DE LA NITROGUANIDINE
AU MOYEN DE LA CALORIMÉTRIE À VITESSE D'ACCÉLÉRATION

par

P.P. Lee* et M.H.Back**

RÉSUMÉ

On a utilisé la calorimétrie à vitesse d'accélération pour étudier la décomposition thermique de la nitroguanidine. Trois méthodes ont été employées pour le traitement des données de l'essai afin d'évaluer l'énergie d'activation et le facteur des fréquences. Deux méthodes, par lesquelles les données ont été recueillies durant la réaction complète, ont produit des énergies d'activation très élevées, alors que les mesures évaluées en utilisant seulement les mesures au stade initial de décomposition étaient beaucoup plus basses. Les résultats laissent supposer que la décomposition est accélérée par les produits de réaction gazeux. D'autres études montrent que ni la dilution de l'échantillon avec une matière inerte ni la substitution de l'atmosphère d'azote par l'atmosphère d'air dans la bombe-témoin ont eu un effet marqué sur la vitesse de décomposition. Les constantes de vitesse ont été comparées à celles des études précédentes, et on a conclu qu'un changement important dans le mécanisme de décomposition se produit à environ 160°C.

MOTS-CLÉS: décomposition thermique, calorimétrie à vitesse d'accélération, cinétique, nitroguanidine.

*Chimiste, Laboratoire canadien de recherche sur les explosifs, CANMET, Énergie, Mines et Ressources Canada, Ottawa.

**Professeur, Département de chimie, Université d'Ottawa, Ottawa.

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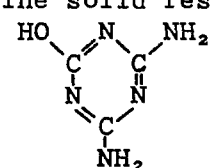
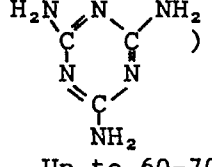
INTRODUCTION

Nitroguanidine is an important ingredient in triple base propellants. It exists in two forms, α and β , which melt at the same temperature, 232°C, although higher melting points, 246°C and 257°C, have been reported [1]. DTA studies of Ripper and Krien [2] suggested that the α form begins to decompose at 187°C, while the β form decomposes at 205°C. Many tests concerning the properties of nitroguanidine have been performed by the U.S. Army Material Command [3].

From the thermal decomposition of nitroguanidine in the range 190-240°C, the main gaseous products are N_2O , H_2O , NH_3 and CO_2 , accompanied by a large quantity of solid products. Stals and Pitt [4] discussed the structure and reactivity of nitroguanidine and concluded that intramolecular hydrogen bonding was stronger than intermolecular hydrogen bonding. They proposed a mechanism involving two pathways. The first decomposition pathway involved nitramide (NH_2NO_2) and cyanamide (NH_2CN) as intermediates, while nitrocyuanamide ($HN-C\equiv N$) was the intermediate from the second pathway.

Studies of the decomposition by thermoanalytical techniques showed that a single exotherm occurred at 250°C [5] while a thermogravimetric study [6] showed that the initial weight loss began at 220°C. Rogers [7,8] measured an activation energy for decomposition by the DSC technique of 21 kcal mol.⁻¹.

Volk [9] identified the solid products and analyzed the gaseous products of nitroguanidine decomposition by mass spectrometry. He found that N_2O and NH_3 were the main gaseous products and their ratio was temperature dependent.

The solid residue at 130°C, melamine () and ammeline () was analyzed using HPLC. Up to 60-70% weight loss occurred during decomposition. From the measurements of the rate of weight loss, an activation energy of 51.6 kcal mol.⁻¹ was obtained. The decomposition was strongly affected by confinement.

Taylor and Andrews, Jr. [10] used the flowing-afterglow spectroscopy technique to study the solid phase thermal decomposition reaction. NH_3 , H_2O , N_2O and CO_2 evolved from nitroguanidine were analyzed by monitoring the emission of NH^* , OH^* , N_2O^+ , and CO_2^+ . Activation energies in the range 70-110 kcal mol⁻¹ and correspondingly high frequency factors in the range 10^{30} - 10^{50} sec⁻¹ were obtained from the measurements of the rate as a function of temperature. They suggested that autocatalytic evolution of gases may lead to violent decomposition above 160°C. After this phenomenon occurred once, the activation energy reduced to 25-35 kcal mol⁻¹ with frequency factor in the range 10^5 - 10^7 sec⁻¹.

Few studies of the kinetics of the decomposition have been attempted. Because of the complexity of the reaction, the kinetic parameters which have been reported are difficult to interpret in terms of the mechanism of the decomposition. The present work describes the decomposition of nitroguanidine in the accelerating rate calorimeter. The effects of sample size, confinement of gaseous products, composition of the atmosphere and dilution have been investigated. Methods for determining the activation energy from the data, following the equations derived by Townsend and Tou [11], were examined.

EXPERIMENTAL

Apparatus

The accelerating rate calorimeter was introduced as an approach for hazard evaluation of exothermically reactive materials. The container and the sample are maintained in an adiabatic environment. Heat generated by the decomposition reaction does not dissipate to the surrounding and the decomposition proceeds as a self-accelerating reaction. The instrument used in the present experiments was developed at Dow Chemical Company and manufactured by Columbia Scientific Industries of Austin, Texas. A detailed description of the instrument design and operation logic can be found in the literature [11-14]. Some modifications to the ARC to resolve problems in sample loading and pressure measurements have been described elsewhere [15,16].

The thermal decomposition of nitroguanidine was studied using the Hastelloy C, 1 inch diameter, spherical bomb with the filler tube of 3/16 inch O.D. and 1/2 inch length. For the confined system, the bomb was connected to a pressure transducer and the pressure was monitored throughout the reaction. For the non-confined system the bomb was only loosely connected to the transducer and the gaseous products were allowed to escape. In most of the experiments the bomb was filled with air at atmospheric pressure. Some experiments were performed in an atmosphere of N₂. The thermal inertia ranged from 9.4 to 23.4, obtained by using weights of sample between 0.2 and 0.5 grams. In some experiments nitroguanidine was diluted with silica in ratios of 1:1, 1:2 and 1:5.

Experiments were performed using the heat-wait-search method. The sample and the container was first heated to 100°C and held 30 min. for thermal equilibrium before the rate-search step. After the wait period, if the self-heat rate is less than the detection limit, 0.02°C min⁻¹, the ARC proceeds automatically to the next preselected temperature. When an exothermic reaction was detected, the calorimeter was maintained in an adiabatic condition and the measurements of time, temperature and pressure were collected and stored in the microprocessor.

Materials

H-N-NO₂

Nitroguanidine (HN=C-NH₂) with minimum purity 99% and average particle diameter 6.0-4.3 microns, was from Nigu Chemie, Waldkraiburg, W. Germany. The material was stored at room temperature with no further purification. Silica, 240 mesh, was obtained from Fisher Scientific.

RESULTS

Effect of Confinement

In the confined system, the decomposition commenced between 161 and 165°C, depending on the values of the thermal inertia. The time to maximum rate was short and pressure increase was fast. The results are

summarized in Table 1 and an example of self-heat rate and pressure as a function of $1/T$ is shown in Figure 1. The total adiabatic temperature rise was in the range of 15-17°C. After reaction, the weight loss was approximately 60%.

In the non-confined system, with sample size 0.25 grams, the onset of decomposition was detected at about 200°C and the self-heat rate was slow. The increase in temperature was too small to allow an analysis of the data and the results from these experiments were not considered further. As observed in previous studies, confinement strongly affects the decomposition [9].

Effect of Atmosphere

In these experiments the bomb was purged with nitrogen for 15 min., 30 min and 20 hours respectively. The results are included in Table 1. No difference in the results of these experiments and those under air atmosphere were observed. Decomposition commenced about 161°C and the adiabatic temperature rise for the total calorimeter system, $\Delta T_{AB,S}$, was in the range of 14-18°C, depending on the values of the thermal inertia.

These results show that oxygen does not affect the rate of decomposition, either through secondary reaction of reactive intermediates or through additional heat release from oxidative processes.

Table 1

Thermal decomposition of nitroguanidine under confined system

Expt#	Weight gm	\emptyset	T _o °C (initial data)	m _o °C min-1 (initial data)	T _m °C (at maximum rate)	M _m °C min-1 (at maximum rate)	$\Delta T_{AB,s}$ °C
<u>air atmosphere</u>							
165	0.2135	20.9	165.9	0.04	172.4	28.5	14.9
166	0.2540	17.7	161.0	0.02	170.1	21.0	17.3
231	0.2362	19.6	161.7	0.04	168.9	44.5	16.6
249	0.2228	21.2	166.6	0.09	175.2	10.8	12.8
250	0.2541	18.6	160.9	0.03	167.3	30.5	15.6
328	0.3074	15.1	160.9	0.03	171.2	25.5	18.0
<u>N₂ atmosphere</u>							
349	0.2119	23.4	161.2	0.03	169.8	15.5	14.1
350	0.2682	18.6	156.1	0.03	166.9	15.3	17.9
351	0.2153	22.6	161.5	0.04	172.1	8.8	14.6
<u>diluted with silica, air atmosphere</u>							
358	NGu:Silica;1:1 0.6062	17.3	160.9	0.05	169.6	24.0	18.8
359	NGu:Silica;1:2 0.8866	18.7	161.0	0.07	169.1	19.0	17.3
360	NGu:Silica;1:5 1.7920	21.8	156.3	0.05	168.5	9.3	18.2

Effect of Diluent

To reduce the rate of decomposition and thereby improve the kinetic analysis, the sample was diluted with Silica. A 0.3 gram sample of nitroguanidine was mixed with silica in ratios of 1:1, 1:2 and 1:5. After thorough mixing, each mixture was tested individually by the step heat method in a confined system under air atmosphere. The thermal inertia, ϕ , is defined as follows:

for pure compound

$$\phi = 1 + \frac{M_b C_{vb}}{M_s C_{vs}}$$

for diluted material

$$\phi = 1 + \frac{M_b C_{vb}}{M_s C_{vs}} + \frac{M_d C_{vd}}{M_s C_{vs}}$$

Where M and C_v refer to mass and specific heat at constant volume, respectively. The subscripts b,s and d refer to bomb, sample and diluent, respectively.

The results of one of these experiments is compared with pure NGu in Figure 2 and all the results are included in Table 1. Dilution with silica apparently had no effect on the pattern of decomposition.

Calculation of the Activation Energy

In this study, the activation energy of decomposition of nitroguanidine was calculated following the three methods which were derived by Townsend and Tou [11]. The experiments in the non-confined system had very short exotherms which did not provide enough data for the determination of the activation energy. Only the data from the confined system were analyzed.

(a) Calculation from k^*

The estimation of the Arrhenius parameters from the plot of k^* against $1/T$ was the simplest approach, since the curve was plotted automatically from the microprocessor of the ARC. Assuming a first order reaction, k^* is defined as:

$$k^* = \frac{m_T}{T_F - T}$$

where T is the temperature, m_T is the self-heat rate at that temperature and T_F is the final temperature. In the decomposition of nitroguanidine, the self-heat rate increased very rapidly, giving a very steep slope, a high activation energy, and a correspondingly high value for the frequency factor. The results are included in Table 1 and an example of an Arrhenius plot is shown in Figure 3.

(b) Calculation from time to maximum rate

The relationship between the time to maximum rate and the absolute temperature was discussed by Townsend and Tou [11]. For reactions with activation energies greater than about 50 kcal mol^{-1} , the time to maximum rate, θ_m , could be expressed in the Arrhenius form:

$$\ln \theta_m = \frac{E}{R} \frac{1}{T} - \ln A$$

where E is the activation energy, and A is the frequency factor. The time to maximum rate was plotted as a function of $1/T$ and a typical result is shown in Figure 4. The slope was determined by linear regression. The activation energies and the frequency factors determined by this method were in agreement with those obtained from method (a) with a similar range of uncertainty.

(c) Calculation from the initial rate

For determination of the activation energy by methods (a) and (b), data from the complete course of the reaction were used. For method (c), also described by Townsend and Tou [11], data only from the initial stages of the reaction are used. For this method temperatures are determined at constant self-heat rates for experiments with different value of ϕ . For an accurate estimation of these temperatures, the self-heat rate is plotted as a function of temperature for each experiment. Figure 5 shows the data obtained under N_2 atmosphere. The activation energy was obtained from the following equation.

$$\frac{1}{T_2} = \frac{1}{T_1} + \frac{R}{E} \ln \frac{\phi_1}{\phi_2}$$

where T_1 and T_2 are the temperatures where a particular self-heat rate was observed with thermal inertias ϕ_1 and ϕ_2 , respectively.

From the smoothed curves, values of T_1 and T_2 were estimated for self-heat rate of 0.03, 0.04, 0.05, and 0.06 $^{\circ}C \text{ min}^{-1}$. Average values for the activation energy and frequency factor obtained by all three methods are given in Table 2.

DISCUSSION

It is evident that application of methods (a) and (b) gives an activation energy very different from that obtained by method (c). Such high values for $\log A$ and E would in ordinary circumstances be dismissed as meaningless and possibly all values of the activation energy outside normal requirements for bond-breaking many be regarded as artificial. Certainly, methods for extracting Arrhenius parameters from measurements of rates of decomposition made under non-isothermal conditions have been questioned [17-20] and have been shown to give erroneous results in some circumstances [21].

Most of the methods, including those used here, assume that the rate of decomposition follows an Arrhenius dependence on temperature, which implies that the decomposition follows the same path over the temperature range studied. For methods (a) and (b) this range covers the complete course of the decomposition, whereas method (c) uses data from the initial stages only. The large difference in activation energy therefore suggests that changes in the mechanism occur during the decomposition which have a marked effect on the rate. These changes drastically alter the empirical Arrhenius parameters to the point where they no longer describe a statistical rate of passage over an energy barrier which can be related to bonds broken and formed during the reaction.

Comparison of the present results with those obtained in previous studies by other methods, summarized in Table 2, reveals that a range of values almost as great as observed in the present experiments has been reported. Interpretation of these results by comparison of the activation energies is of dubious value and instead we have made direct comparison of the rate constants.

It appears that the results fall into two groups, shown in Figures 6A and 6B, where the values of the rate constants are shown in the temperature range where they were measured. The first group, shown in Figure 6A, includes the average of the present results, the isothermal measurements [9] and two measurements of the rate of production of N_2O using the flowing-afterglow techniques [10]. The second group, in Figure 6B includes the remainder of the results of the measurements by the flowing-afterglow technique.

Leaving for the moment the question of the significance of the two groups of data, both sets suggest that the mechanism of the decomposition changes significantly at temperatures in the range 160-170°C. Both sets of data fulfill, within the uncertainty of the measurements, the condition outlined by Agrawal [22] which suggests a relationship between the measurements, either from different methods or over a different range of temperature. In both Figures data from the high and low temperature regions extrapolate to a common point of intersection.

Table 2

Measured activation energies for the decomposition of nitroguanidine

Technique	Temperature range °C	Activation energy kcal mol ⁻¹	Frequency factor log A(sec ⁻¹)	Reference
flowing-	160-180	70-110	30-50	Taylor and.
afterglow	<160	25-35	5-7	Andresw Jr.
Isothermal	110-240	51.6	21.2	Volk
DSC	200-204	20.9	7.5	Rogers
ARC				present work
	160-180	310±50	150±20	method (a)
	160-180	300±35	145±20	method (b)
	160-168	20±2	---	method (c)

From Figure 6A the point is 160°C and from Figure 6B the point is 170°C. All the measurements, including the present, show that the change in the rate constant with temperature is much smaller at temperatures below 150°C than it is at temperatures above 160°C. The results reported by Volk [9], who analyzed the products of the reaction over a wide range of temperature, indicated a similar change in mechanism. He suggested that at low temperatures the products of the reaction inhibited the decomposition and that at higher temperatures ammonia and water caused an autocatalytic reaction.

The rate constants derived from the measurements by the two techniques used in the high temperature range are nevertheless very different and a much more rapid increase in the rate with temperature was observed from the measurements of the decomposition in the ARC. These differences very likely arise through the over-simplification of the methods used to derive the rate constants and not to fundamental differences in the mechanism of the decomposition in the high temperature region. In the ARC, the self-heating causes a very rapid acceleration of the temperature and any effects of autocatalysis will be strongly magnified. The Arrhenius parameters may not be themselves be directly interpreted in terms of a mechanism, but they do indicate the occurrence of a highly exothermic complex reaction [23].

Whether the difference between the two groups of data is significant or due only to experimental error, or error in derivation of the rate constant cannot be solved at this stage. It seems apparent, however, that viewed separately the individual measurements in Table 2 do not lead to any reasonable interpretation of the decomposition process, but taken together they suggest a related cause or a common process which manifest itself to different extents under different conditions of measurement.

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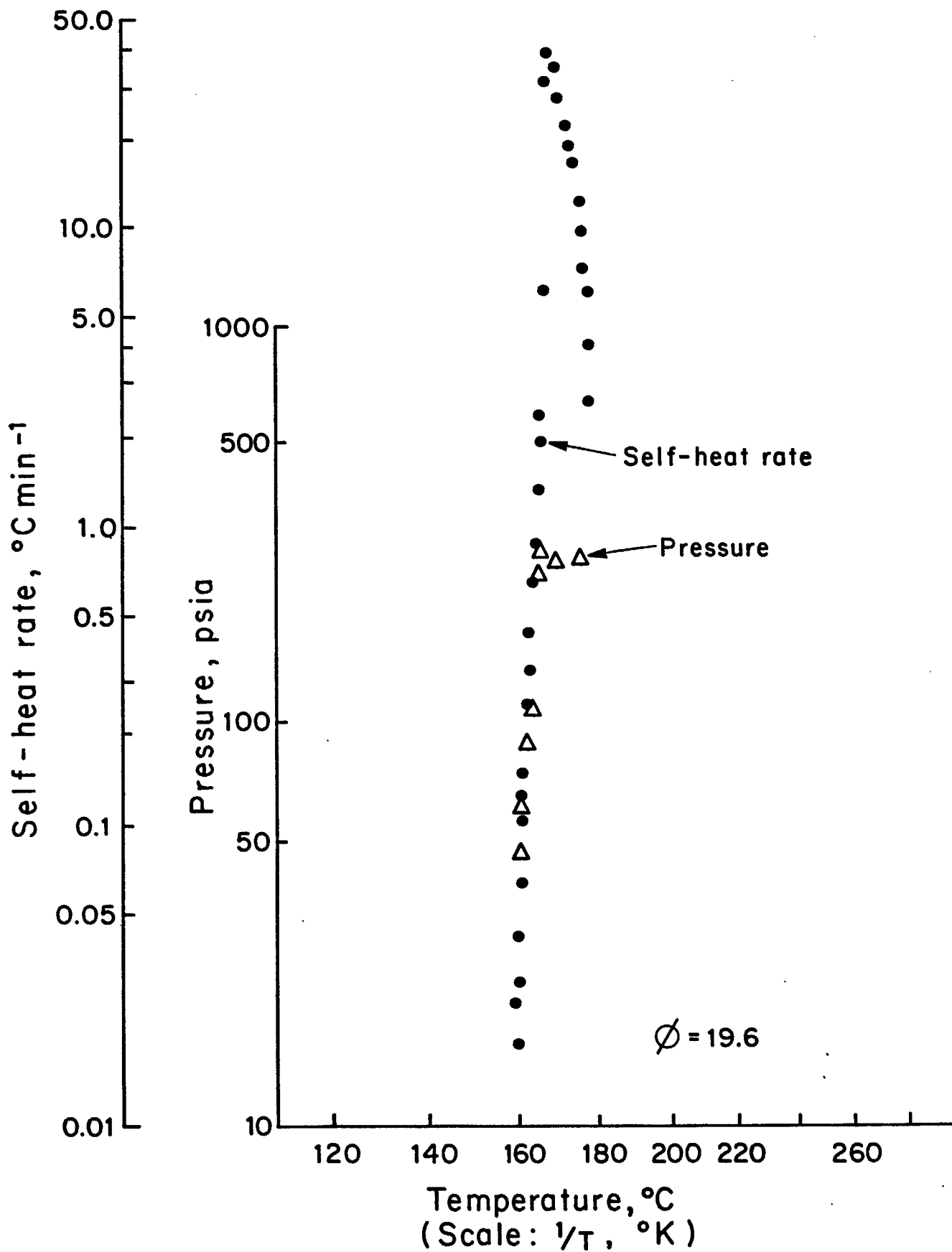


Fig. 1 - Self-heat rate & pressure as a function of $1/T$.
Confined system; air atmosphere.

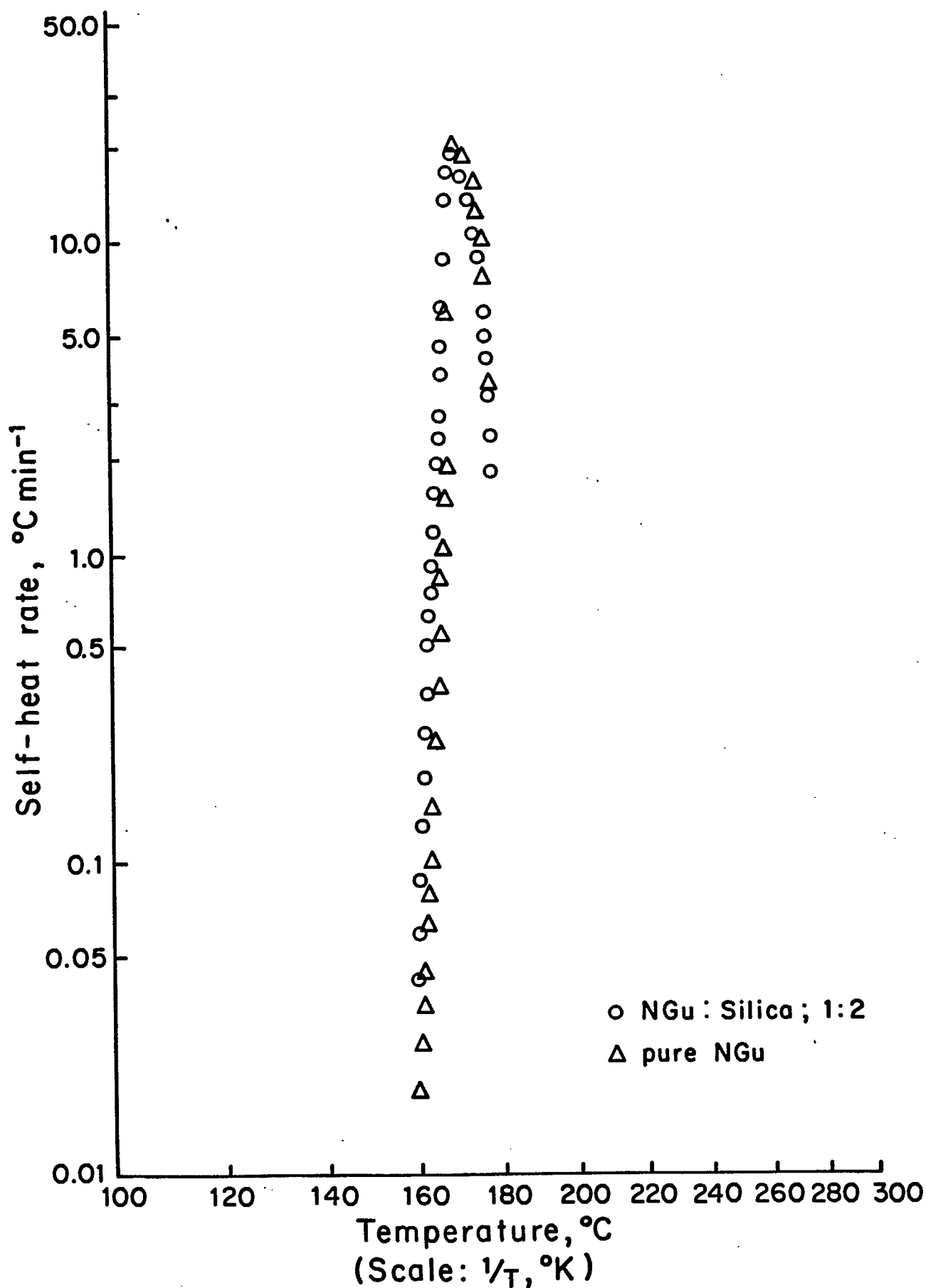


Fig. 2 - Thermal decomposition of nitroguanidine.
Confined system; air atmosphere.

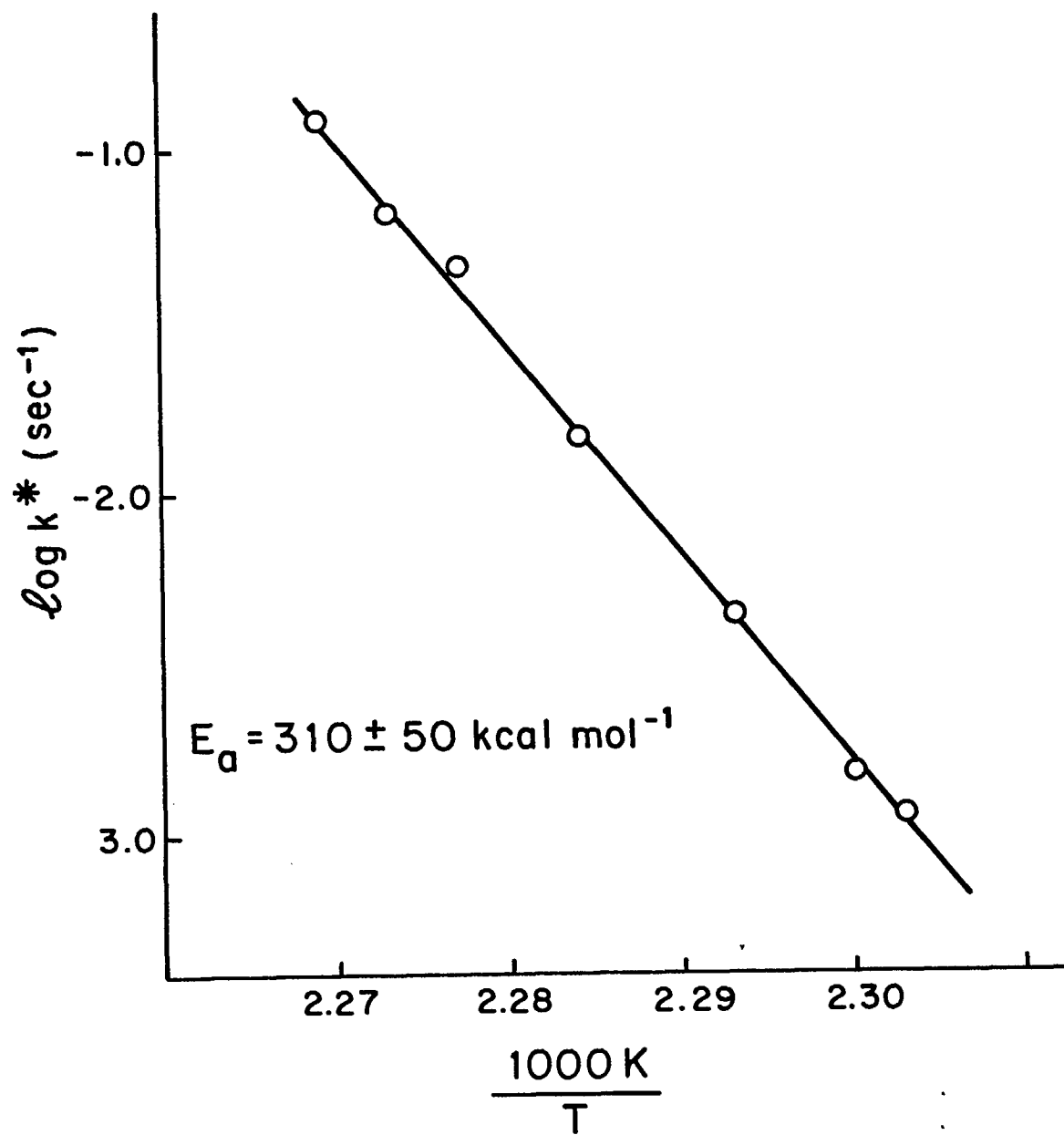


Fig. 3 - Rate constant as a function of $1/T$.
Confined system; air atmosphere.

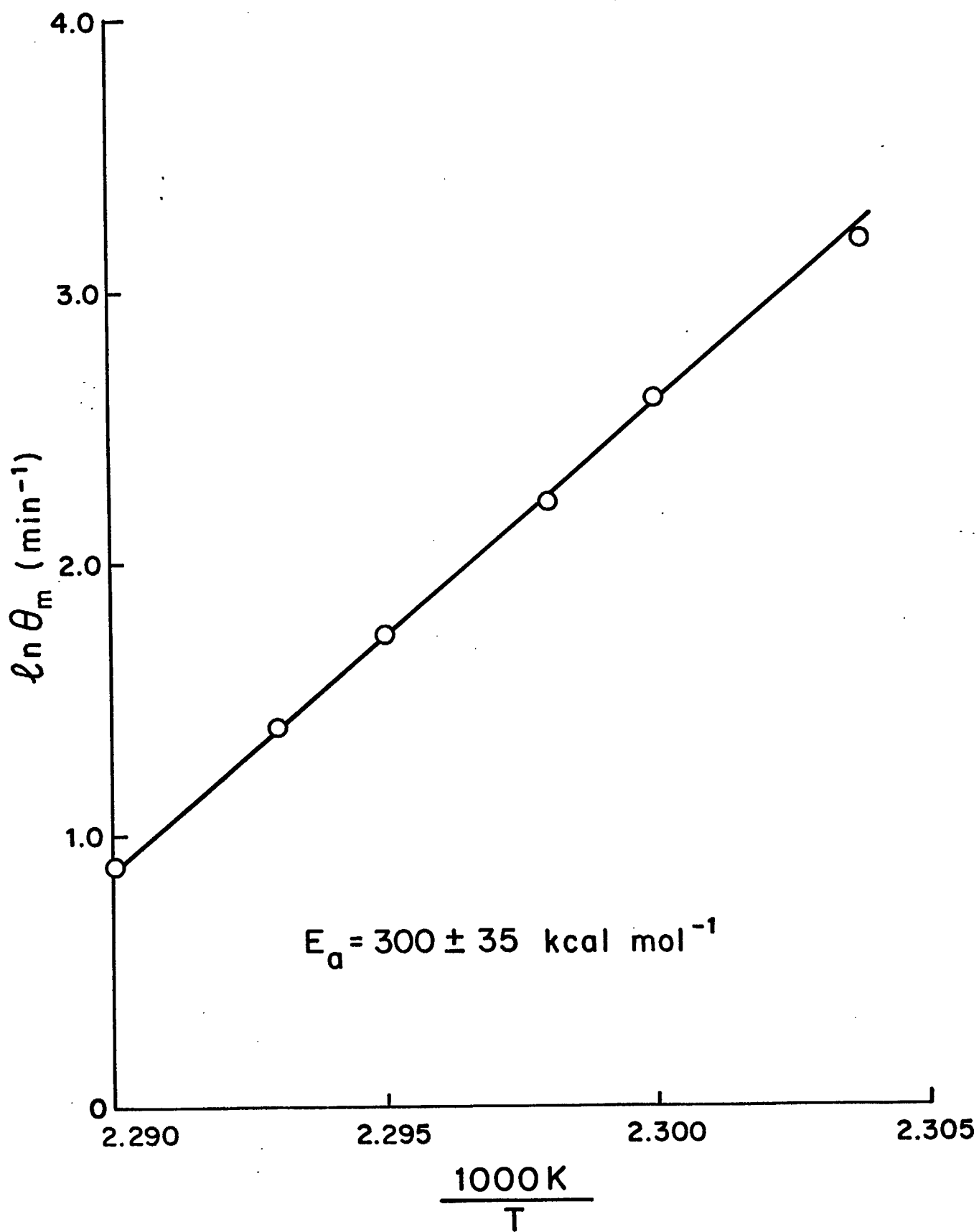


Fig. 4 - Time to maximum rate as a function of $1/T$.
Confined system; air atmosphere.

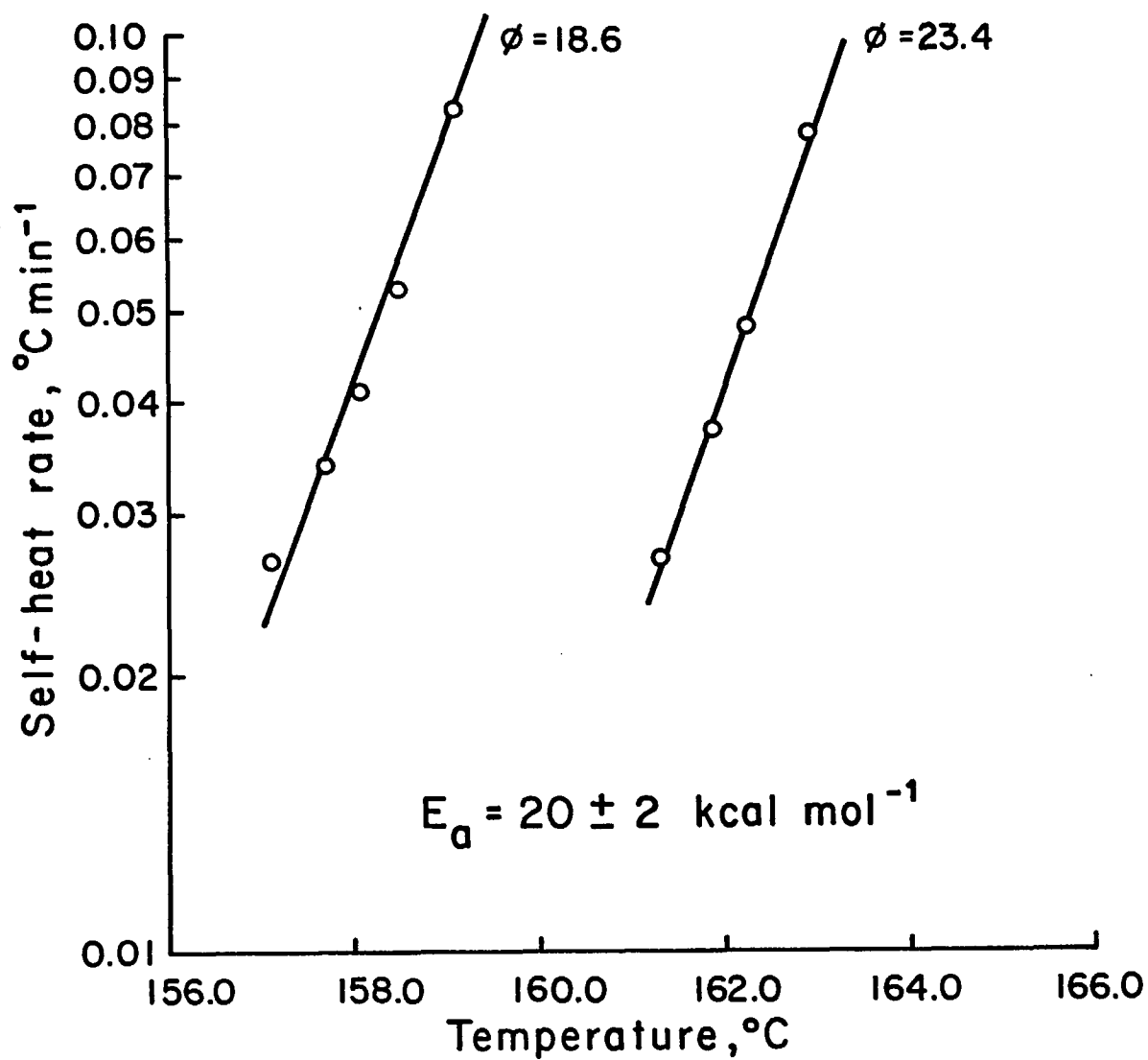


Fig. 5 - Self-heat rate as a function of temperature in the initial stages of the reaction. Confined system; N_2 atmosphere.

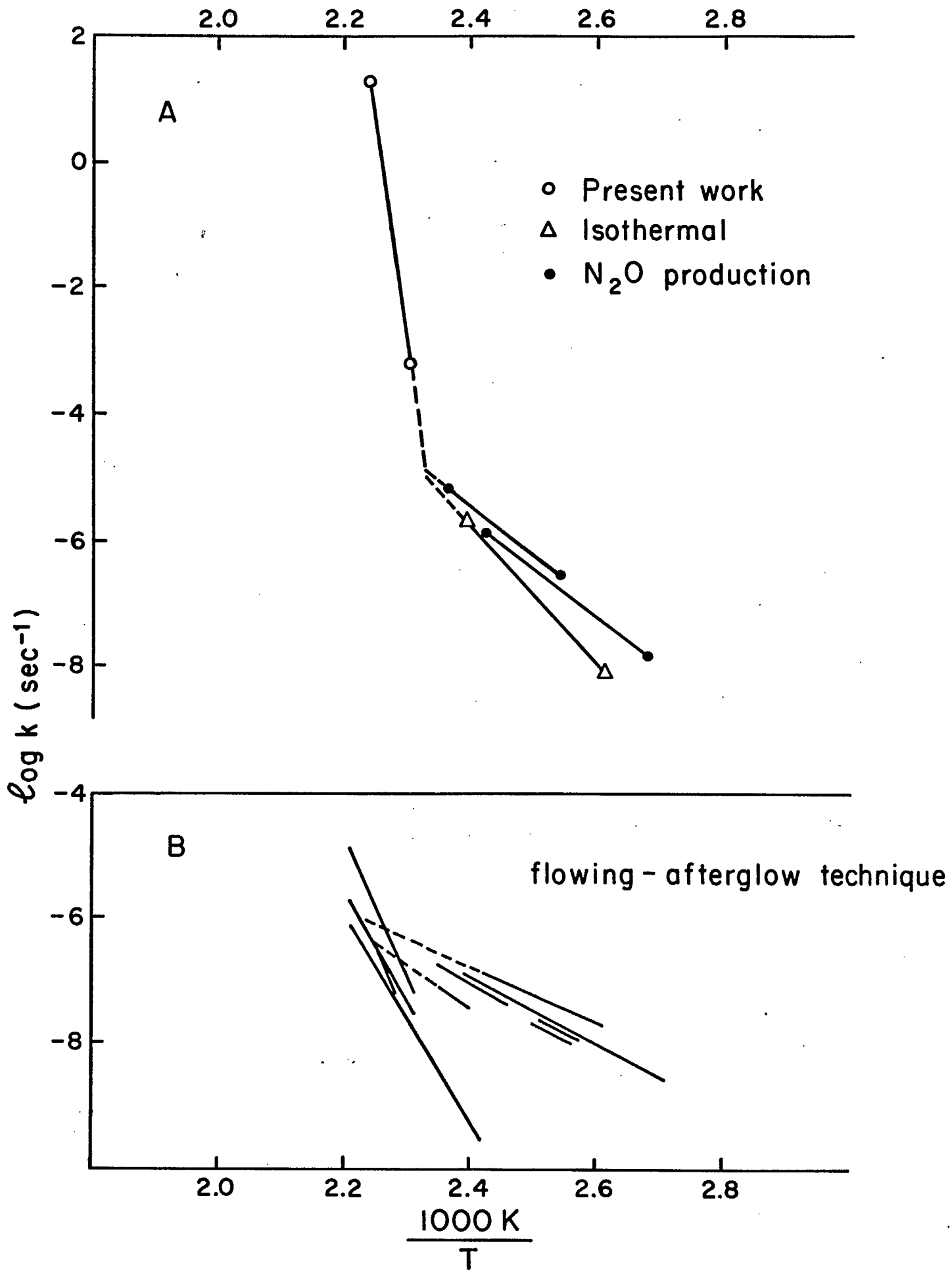


Fig. 6 - Arrhenius plots for rate constants for decomposition of nitroguanidine.

