Twitter Thread by Zach Weinersmith

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Let's talk about the space-tampon story. OK, so this is a story confirmed by Sally Ride and Kathy Sullivan, where a male engineer asks if 100 tampons is good for one week, and she politely tells him he can go a lot lower. Very often repeated, and true so far as it goes. BUT

In an interview by Weitekamp with Rhea Seddon, the only MD among the women in that class, she said she was actually consulted on the decision! She said they ended up with a big number out of concern about microgravity effects and due to the NASA approach to redundancy.

Microgravity concerns were not unreasonable. In Sally Ride's biography by Sherr, she discusses how the first woman who actually had to use the tampons in space had issues with "capillary action." Space is horrible.

Anyway, so, the story Ride and Sullivan tell is true (and funny!) but there's some missing context. I am not a historian, and certainly not a historian on this topic, but I have read a lot of books. A plausible sequence goes like this:

1) Seddon is consulted as the lady MD.
2) Due to unknowns, gives a high number
3) NASA management doubles that number, out of abundance of caution
4) A kit with infinity tampons goes to the other women, delivered by some (happily never identified) male tech

This then gets told and retold as story about the idiocy of male NASA engineers, when it's more a story about bureaucracy creating weird results.

For the record, there ARE stories about funny/stupid things male engineers did, including bizarre early urine systems for women.

The latter were replaced by fancy adult diapers, which worked so well the men now use them too, instead of the old external catheter system which was kind of embarrassing (had to be sized to the individual) and tended to slip off.