

We are looking for a nonzero solutions of

$$A^2 = 0.$$

Of course, this means that we are looking for a nonzero solution of

$$AA = 0.$$

If we can find such an  $A$  that is nonsingular, then it is invertible and

$$\begin{aligned}A^{-1}(AA) &= A^{-1}0 \\(A^{-1}A)A &= 0 \\IA &= 0 \\A &= 0\end{aligned}$$

Of course, this is a contradiction, because the zero matrix is not invertible (it's singular).

Thus, in the  $2 \times 2$  case, if  $A$  is a nonzero solution of  $AA = 0$ , then  $A$  is singular. Thus, the second row must be a multiple of the first and the matrix must look like this:

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} a & b \\ ka & kb \end{pmatrix}$$

Now,  $AA = 0$ , so

$$\begin{aligned}\begin{pmatrix} a & b \\ ka & kb \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} a & b \\ ka & kb \end{pmatrix} &= \begin{pmatrix} a^2 + kab & ab + kb^2 \\ ka^2 + k^2ab & kab + k^2b^2 \end{pmatrix} \\&= \begin{pmatrix} a(a + kb) & b(a + kb) \\ ka(a + kb) & kb(a + kb) \end{pmatrix} \\&= \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}.\end{aligned}$$

Let's assume for the moment that  $a \neq 0$  and  $b \neq 0$  (are their other cases?). Then we must have that

$$\begin{aligned}a + kb &= 0 \\a &= -kb.\end{aligned}$$

Then, with  $a = -kb$ , we have

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} a & b \\ ka & kb \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} -kb & b \\ -k^2b & kb \end{pmatrix}.$$

For example, with  $k = 2$  and  $b = 1$ , we have

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} -kb & b \\ -k^2b & kb \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} -2 & 1 \\ -4 & 2 \end{pmatrix}.$$

Checking,

$$\begin{pmatrix} -2 & 1 \\ -4 & 2 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} -2 & 1 \\ -4 & 2 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}.$$

You can get a horde of answers by varying  $k$  and  $b$ . Now what about other cases?