Q101 – Why did the United States enter World War I?

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:
For nearly three years, the United States stayed out of World War I – a conflict that embroiled most of Europe. It was the sinking of American ships by German submarines that caused us to enter the war.

We joined the Allied Powers – including Britain, France, Russia, and Italy. Opposing them were the Central Powers: Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria.
As Europe lurched toward war in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson declared America "must be neutral in fact as well as in name." And most Americans agreed.
Our neutrality was tested in 1915 when a German U-boat sank the British ship Lusitania. Nearly 2,000 people died – including 128 Americans. President Wilson protested – and Germany pledged to end its unrestricted submarine warfare.
Wilson was re-elected in 1916 with the slogan "He Kept Us Out of War." In 1917, however, before his second term had even began, Germany broke its pledge. More ships were sunk, more Americans died. Now Wilson said, "The world must be made safe for democracy" – and Congress declared war on Germany.
Americans flocked to enlist, though Congress also instituted the draft. More than two million Americans served in Europe – a surge that turned the tide and won the war. But, more than 50,000 Americans died in combat. 60,000 more from disease.
World War I revealed the strength of America: a sleeping giant with the factories and manpower to field a large army on a distant continent.

That strength that would be tested again in the second World War.