Q96 – What U.S. war ended slavery?

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:
The Civil War began in order to preserve the Union – but it evolved into a crusade against slavery.

A postwar amendment to the Constitution abolished slavery, but slavery in the South had been destroyed by war itself – four years of battle fought by three million men. They were lawyers and teachers, shopkeepers and iron workers, but mostly farmers.
The typical Union soldier was about five feet eight, and only 143 pounds. Most joined up at 21 or younger. They endured heat and cold and dust and fatigue. Poor food, crude shelter, dreadful hygiene. And furious battle.
Most combat casualties were inflicted by a soft lead bullet – the Minié ball. Flattening on impact, it shattered bone and shredded tissue. Medicine was primitive. The best-known treatment for a wounded limb was amputation – giving surgeons the grisly nickname “sawbones.” Bacteria and germs were not understood. What the Minié ball missed, gangrene might claim.
Disease killed twice as many men as combat. Typhoid fever and scarlet fever. Tuberculosis and smallpox. Measles and malaria. Water contaminated by latrines created the worst killer – dysentery.
In his second inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln suggested the war might go on “until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword.”
More than 620,000 men died in the Civil War – about two percent of the U.S. population – and the figure may have been higher. It was their sacrifice – blood drawn by the sword – that ended slavery.