

## ARMY VETERAN THOMAS NHAN TRI NGUYEN



Army veteran Thomas “Tom” Nhan Tri Nguyen is of Vietnamese heritage. He grew up in Adelaide, the only child of migrants who were fleeing war-torn Vietnam, and they spoke Vietnamese at home.

Tom, 41, who now lives in Sydney, joined the Australian Defence Force (ADF) in 2004.

Tom is the first to admit he had a smooth run through high school and university and into a permanent job in the Commonwealth public service.

“At some point, I thought: ‘Is that it?’ and started to cast around for a challenge.

“The ADF looked like it would be something completely out of my comfort zone.

“My high school had a gifted music program so rather than play sports I was playing musical instruments. I certainly didn’t know anyone who was considering an army career!”

After completing reserve officer training in 2007, Tom was commissioned as an artillery officer and as a troop commander carried out the field roles of gun-line officer and shooting officer.

In 2012, he became liaison officer to Commander 7 Brigade and fulfilled the same position for Commander 11 Brigade in 2013.

Tom believes a career in the ADF is second to none.

“It’s a career full of challenges, because of the emphasis on training, teamwork and leadership.

“I have been fortunate enough to experience some of the best training available in the corporate world, and Army training is on a par with that. The quality of training was very high. It felt like no expense was spared.

“Where army training was unique, of all the training I have ever experienced, was in its understanding that the truest test of learning objectives is the ability to apply them under high-stress situations. Defence was very good at simulating these situations. It always took a lot of resources and a high level of motivation from training staff, but the effect was worth it. No-one does this like the Army.

“The Army’s training in teamwork and people leadership is similarly rigorous,” Tom adds.

“In most corporate environments I’ve seen, teamwork is selected for, and people leadership training is cursory. In the Army, developing the mindset and capabilities for teamwork and leadership was central.

“I was tested and developed in a number of ways that would not have been possible in any other career.

“The combination of physical, mental, and social stress in training exercises was exhilarating and very satisfying when surmounted.”

Tom had always intended to serve in the armed forces during his 20s then look at a business career.

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The trigger to leave the Army was being offered a place at INSEAD, a prestigious French business school, in a Masters of Business Administration program.

After graduating, he lived and worked in Copenhagen, the capital city of Denmark.

“Going from military to MBA to management consulting is a well-trodden path, particularly in the US. Because the firm I was joining, McKinsey & Company, was US-based, they had a clear recruiting pathway for me, even though it was very competitive,” he says.

“The challenge was that I was mostly operating from European countries, where a military background is less common (even less so than is the case in Australia).

“My time in McKinsey, Telstra and Salesforce has given me the skills, network, and credibility to help big companies solve the biggest strategic questions facing them and tackle what keeps their CEOs up at night,” he says.

In his current role as a freelance consultant, Tom relishes the challenge of answering questions for which there is no set formula.

“My job is to develop and apply structure for answering big, often nebulous, strategic questions, and guide company executives and board members through the process to come to a satisfactory answer that the entire company can get behind.

“I am only engaged to answer questions for which there is no set formula to address, so every engagement is different and challenging.

“There is also the mixed challenge of being analytically rigorous, but also applying emotional intelligence to ensure that all the stakeholders who matter buy in to the approach, process and ultimate solution.”

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