Overview of the Marian Spychalski papers

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Collection Summary
Title: Marian Spychalski papers
Dates: 1906-1988
Collection Number: 2010C26
Creator: Spychalski, Marian.
Collection Size: 3 manuscript boxes (1.2 linear feet)
Repository: Hoover Institution Archives
Stanford, California 94305-6010
Abstract: Memoirs, other writings, clippings, photographs, and memorabilia, relating to underground movements in Poland during World War II, and to postwar political conditions in Poland. Includes a Polish doctoral dissertation by Marek Katolik relating to Marian Spychalski.
Physical Location: Hoover Institution Archives
Languages: Polish
Access
Collection is open for research.
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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Marian Spychalski papers, [Box number], Hoover Institution Archives.
Acquisition Information
Acquired by the Hoover Institution Archives in 2010.
Accruals
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Biographical Note
Marian Spychalski, one of the “founding fathers” of communist Poland and a prominent Polish politician during the period from 1944 to 1968, served as Polish minister of defense, 1956-1968.

Born in 1906, Spychalski became connected with the communist movement in his years as architecture student in Warsaw. During the 1930s, he was a promising young architect and urban planner in Poland, winner of several national and international competitions and awards. During the war, Spychalski headed the intelligence activities of two successive communist underground organizations, Gwardia Ludowa (People's Guard) and Armia Ludowa (People's Army), the principal aims of which were not only fighting the Germans but preparing for eventual “liberation” by the Soviets. A major part of this
effort was gathering intelligence and sabotaging the anti-Nazi struggle of the much larger and more popular, pro-Allied national underground, Armia Krajowa (Home Army). The final year of the war Spychalski spent with the Soviet forces and their Polish communist-led units, quickly advancing to the rank of general. Spychalski headed the first administration of newly liberated Warsaw, then returned to political work in the armed forces as deputy defense minister; he was then appointed as the minister responsible for the postwar reconstruction of Poland, a position he held until the end of 1949. He was arrested in 1950 as part of a broader Soviet plan to rid the Polish communist leadership of people suspected of potential Western or "nationalist" tendencies. Spychalski, who was then imprisoned and brutally interrogated, confessed to everything of which he was accused. Fortunately for him, and hundreds of others, Stalin's death and Nikita Khrushchev's ascension to power brought about a gradual easing of the repressive regime throughout the Soviet bloc. As a result of this "thaw" Spychalski was released from prison in early 1956. A few months later he was completely "rehabilitated," returned to the Politburo, and made minister of defense, a position he held until 1968. Spychalski ended his political career in December 1970 as chairman of the Council of State, or president of communist Poland. He died in retirement in 1980.

Scope and Content of Collection
Memoirs, other writings, clippings, photographs, and memorabilia, relating to underground movements in Poland during World War II, and to postwar political conditions in Poland. Includes a Polish doctoral dissertation by Marek Katolik relating to Marian Spychalski.

The most interesting and valuable part of Spychalski's papers are his memoirs. Written during his retirement, in the mid-1970s, the four-volume, nearly 600-page typescript covers the period of roughly 1930 through 1950. Written largely from the perspective of an architect and urban planner, it focuses on Warsaw: the capital of "bourgeois" Poland, then the suffering and devastated capital of the Nazi-occupied country, and, finally, the rising symbol of the new and just People's Republic. Against this background, Spychalski chronicles many, but not all, of the major events he witnessed or participated in. It is a story written by an educated, committed Marxist, a true believer; therefore it is not only an eyewitness account by a significant player in the historical process but also a primary source for the study of the tortured intellectual meanders of Polish Communists. In addition to the memoirs, the collection includes photographs, selected articles, and many of Spychalski's medals and decorations. The collection is significantly enhanced by biographical reminiscences of Spychalski's wife, Barbara, written after his death in 1980, as well as a massive, unknown to historians, unpublished doctoral dissertation about Spychalski, completed at the Feliks Dzierzynski Military Political Academy in Warsaw in 1988.

Understandably, the Dzierzynski Academy did not survive the political transformation of Poland in 1989-90. Unfortunately, some of the documentation on which the work was based did not survive, due to the wide-scale destruction of the Interior Ministry archives ordered by the departing communist authorities during the same period, making this dissertation potentially even more valuable to historians.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.
World War, 1939-1945--Poland.
Statesmen--Poland.
Katolik, Marek.