

The Story Behind The Song:

“Six Days On The Road”

(written by Earl Greene & Carl Montgomery)

Dave Dudley (#2 country, #13 adult contemporary, #32 pop, 1963)

Johnny Rivers (#58 country, #106 pop, 1974)

Steve Earle & The Dukes (#29, 1988)

Sawyer Brown (#13, 1997)

In the 1940s, folks from around Stevens Point Wisconsin would turn out in droves every time they heard that young Dave Dudley was going to be featured. He was the best performer the small community had ever seen, and everyone thought that one day this high school sensation was going to make it to the big time. The whole town was sure that Dave was going to be a star. But it wasn't country music that they were talking about. It was baseball. Dudley was a six-foot-two-inch star baseball pitcher in his youth. While he played a little guitar on the side, no one seemed to notice. When Dave's future was talked about in barber shops and taverns around the area, the locals had bets on when he would make the major leagues, not when he would sing on the Grand Ole Opry. By 1949, Dudley was playing for a minor league team in Texas, and was well on his way to making himself the Pride of Stevens Point, when a severe arm injury ended his baseball career.

Dudley came home from Texas not knowing which direction to head next. Baseball had been his whole life. His entire identity had been wrapped around his prowess on the baseball field. By getting hurt, he had shattered not only his own dreams, but the hopes of an entire town. In post-war America, playing in the major leagues was about as good as it got. Now it seemed that when local folks talked about Dave, they always began each observation with the words “what if.” Yet, the former baseball star knew that he couldn't live on past glory. In order to pay the bills, he was going to have to find something else that he could do well.

A chance visit to a radio station gave Dudley an opportunity to revive an old talent. A friend remembered Dave's guitar playing and wondered if he would like to perform live on the local station. Dave decided to give it a try, and turned out to be very popular right out of the gate. Fan mail came into the station at such a rate that Dudley soon had his own show. By 1953, Dave formed a trio and for the next seven years performed country music at clubs all across the northern tier of the United States. In 1960, just when it looked as if he was going to get a record contract that would take him to Nashville, Dave was struck by a car and nearly lost his life. Recuperating in bed for the next six months, he eventually worked his way back into radio and a few performances in the Minneapolis area, but his second chance at the big time seemingly had gone the way of the first. The “what ifs” were again coming back to haunt him.

At the time Dudley was striving to regain his momentum, a couple of fellows named Earl Greene and Carl Montgomery were driving a semi-trailer up and down the East coast. Their “Robbins Floor Products” run was six days long. The drivers would leave Tuscumbia, Alabama either Sunday night or early Monday morning and wouldn't return until Saturday afternoon. After cleaning up, the men would then head down to a local club and play country music. After a night of playing, they would return to their rig and head back north with a fresh load of freight.

One day while making a run to Pittsburgh, the two men turned off the radio and began to talk about how long six days really is. As they visited about their type of work and the long, lonely hours involved, one of them said, “You know, a story about being on the road for six days might be a pretty good idea for a song.” Inspired, the drivers used truckers' lingo and began to piece together a song that told the story of a trucker's life. From the ICC, to ten forward gears, to

popping pills to stay awake, their composition began to capture the real feel of the road. It wasn't just a song, it was the autobiography of every truck-driving man who had ever made a long haul. By the time Greene and Montgomery returned home on Saturday, they were ready to deliver a finished product to the patrons at the local club.

"Six Days On The Road" made the rounds in Southern honky-tonks before being carried north by the men who drove the big rigs. Eventually, the song found its way to Minnesota and into the hands of a now fully-recovered Dave Dudley. Buying time at a local studio, Dudley recorded the Greene/Montgomery truck-driving song and printed up a few copies. When Dave hit the road for a series of show dates in North Dakota, he turned the records over to a friend. In his spare time, the man worked the region's truck stops and diners, convincing the owners to put "Six Days On The Road" on their jukeboxes. Dudley's record quickly became a favorite and area radio stations began to clamor for it.

A local label called Soma Records picked up the song and filled orders by simply printing more of Dave's homemade record. When that small label was unable to handle the growing number of orders, Golden Wing Records stepped in and pressed more copies. With absolutely no national publicity, no promotions people working the phones, and without the benefit of a label with which disc jockeys and fans were familiar, "Six Days On The Road" suddenly was traveling coast to coast and border to border. All the while, Dave Dudley was working obscure little clubs in small towns, unaware that he had a potential hit on his hands. By the time he returned home, the nation's over-the-road drivers had made his song a "truckers' anthem" of sorts.

On June 1, 1963, Dave's homemade cut of "Six Days On The Road," on the obscure "Golden Wing" label, entered Billboard's country singles chart. Pushed by the demand of truckers and the disc jockeys who served them, the song climbed up the playlist like an eighteen-wheeler with a quick deadline and a load of perishables. Before it finished delivering the goods, the song's run would last a total of twenty-one weeks, with two of those sitting in the #2 slot. The record even produced decent numbers on Billboard's adult contemporary chart (#13) and the Hot 100 pop chart (#32). Overnight, after working small-town clubs for thirteen years, Dave Dudley was a star.

Mercury Records saw the potential in Dave's deep voice and signed him to a long-term contract. Forming a band known as the Roadrunners, Dudley hit the road playing the most important dates of his life. Several times he rolled up and down the Eastern Seaboard, and six days out on the road was now a comparatively short haul.

Over the course of a career that produced chart hits through 1976, Dudley became a Grand Ole Opry regular, played thousands of dates, and scored with a wide variety of songs touching on, not only trucking, but other themes such as pocket billiards (Tom T. Hall's "The Pool Shark," Dave's lone #1 hit from 1970) to the war in Vietnam ("What We're Fighting For," another Hall composition that reached #4 in 1966, and "Vietnam Blues," an early Kris Kristofferson tune which peaked at #12 that same year).

Yet, it was Dave's signature song "Six Days On The Road," as well as others about trucking, like "Truck Drivin' Son-Of-A-Gun" (#3), "Anything Leaving Town Today" (#12), "There Ain't No Easy Run" (#10), "One More Mile" (#12) and "Me And Ole C. B." (#12) that would instantly identify him everywhere he went. Dudley was the "King of the Truck Stops" and the truckers always thought of him as one of their own.

Over the years, truck drivers have remained some of country music's most loyal fans. Legendary disc jockeys broadcasting on the nighttime sky wave radio signals such as Ralph Emery at WSM/Nashville, Bill Mack at WBAP/Fort Worth, Charlie Douglas at WWL/New Orleans and

Mike Hoyer at WHO/Des Moines kept these hardworking men company on long nights when the road was lonely and the drive was hard. Probably more than any other single group, truckers have identified the most with country music artists, the performers who hit the road traveling from town to town, setting up their sound equipment to do a show, only to tear down and move on again.

In country music's early days, Ted Daffan struck a chord with truck drivers in the early 1940s with "Truck Driver's Blues." Then Dave Dudley came along in the '60s with his steady output of trucker-themed hits. Red Sovine scored with his recitations "Giddyup Go," "Phantom 309" and "Teddy Bear," and C. W. McCall became a household name with "Convoy." In later years, several other acts have paid tribute to truckers through songs like Joe Stampley's "Roll On Big Mama," Jerry Reed's "East Bound And Down," Alabama's "Roll On Eighteen Wheeler," Kathy Mattea's "Eighteen Wheels and A Dozen Roses" and Dan Seals' "Big Wheels In The Moonlight," to name just a few. Yet, the truck-driving song that will always be considered as the most significant – the granddaddy of 'em all – is Dave Dudley's "Six Days On The Road." – JH